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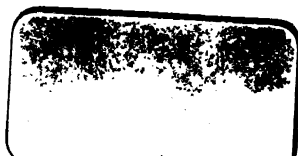
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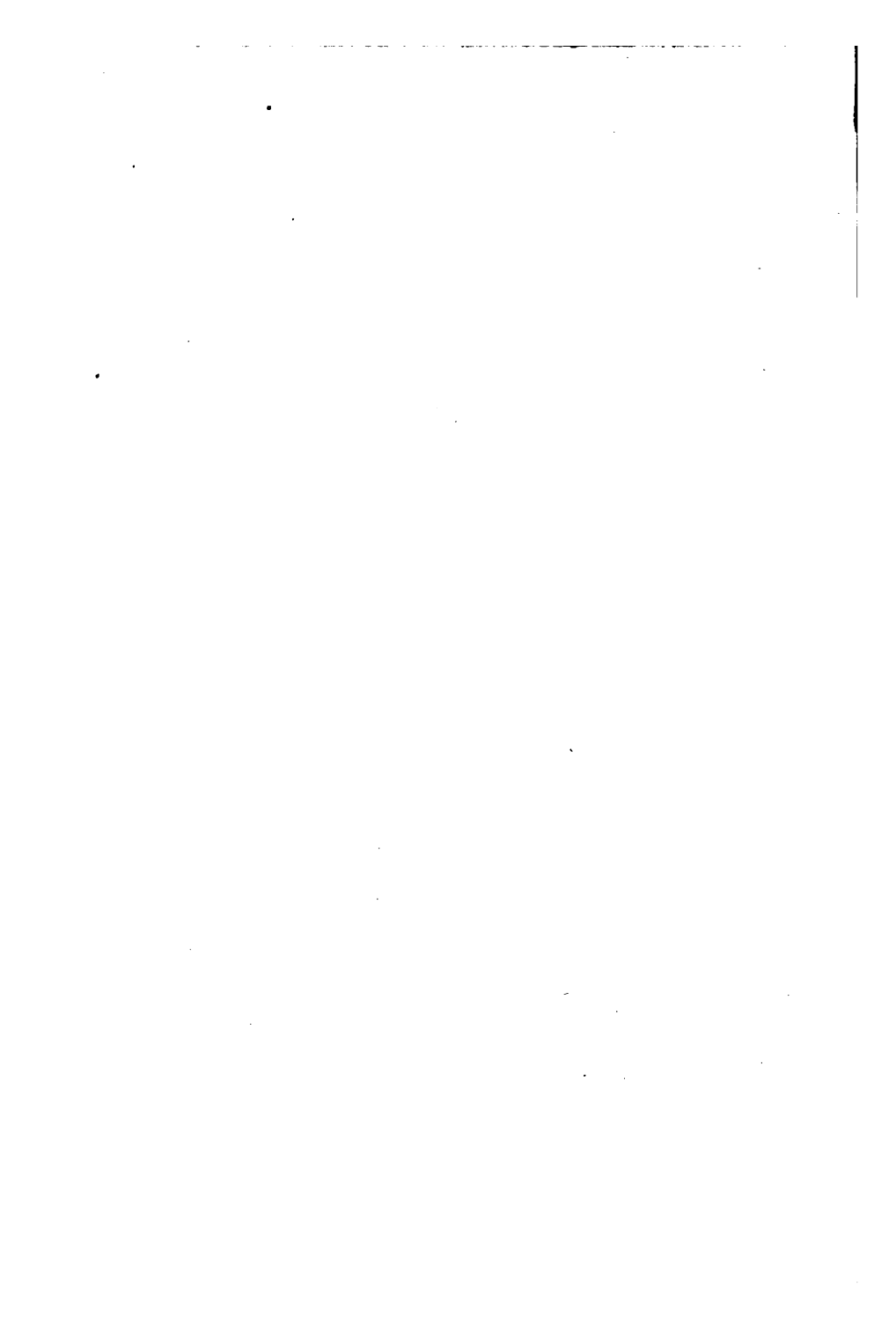
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THE CLEWBEND.

THE CLEWBEND.

BY
DEPHIAS.

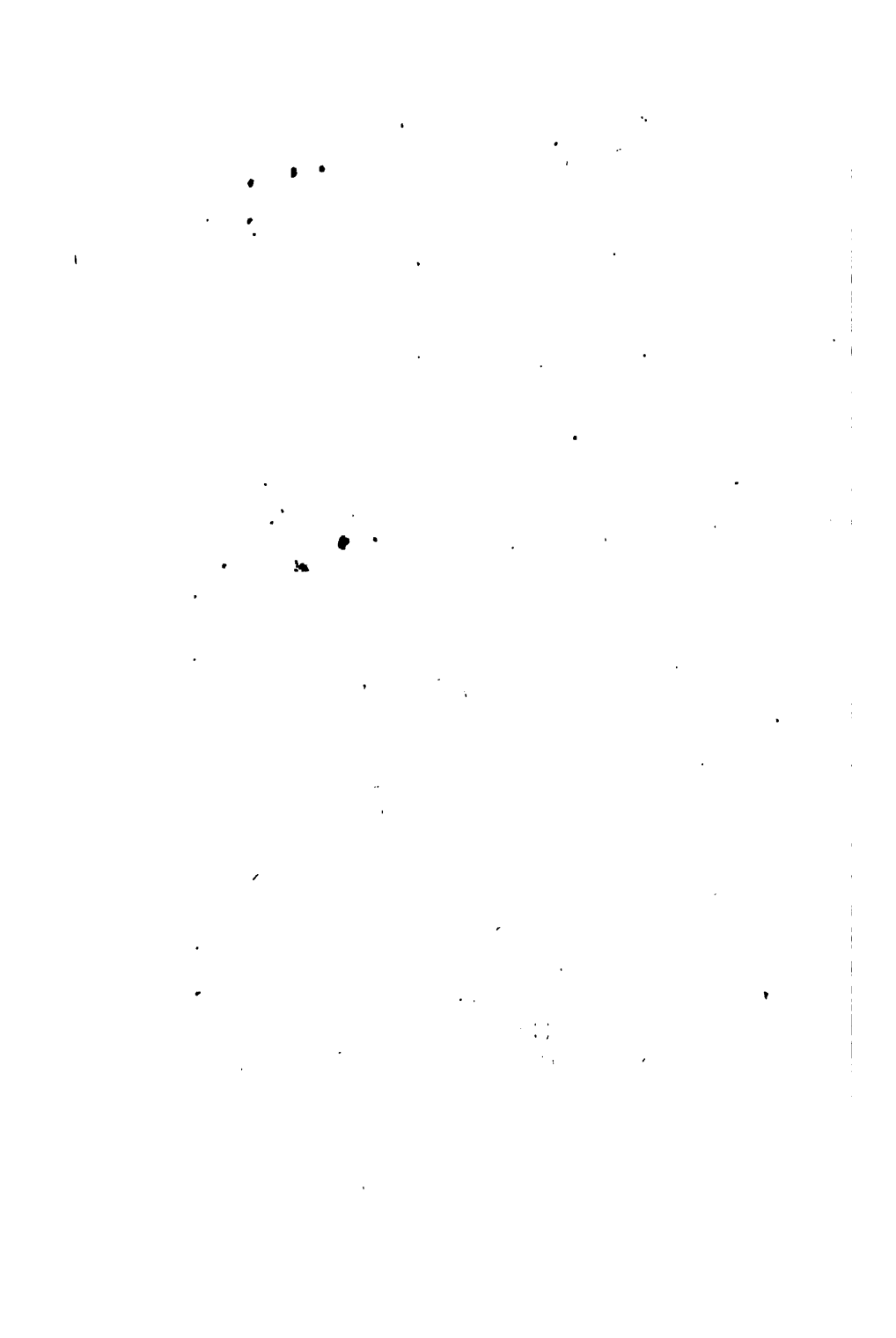
"There's a divinity that shapes our ends
Rough-hew them how we will."
HAMLET.



London:
SAMUEL TINSLEY,
40, SOUTHAMPTON STREET, STRAND.
1876.

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251. d. 556



THE CLEWBEND.

I.

A COUPLE of hours from London by the Eastern Counties Railway you come to a wayside station, small and rural. Only one or two trains stop there in the course of the day; but if the traveller alights there and seeks the miniature waiting-room, the station-master, who has little to do but attend to his sloping vegetable garden, will tell him, if a stranger, that in half an hour he can be picked up by a cross train which will bear him to something livelier.

And he is right, for here it comes snorting and puffing. As it draws up, the guard jumps down. One or two second-class passengers jump out, slamming the doors behind them; the waiting traveller takes his seat. The guard jumps up once more, and with an angry jerk, away goes the speeding engine.

Presently it slackens speed, whilst a porter running by its side calls out, "Hacklebury," with his hand on a door handle.

A young gentleman puts his head out of a first-class carriage. "Here, you fellow, open the door."

The porter touches his cap and lets the young gentleman out; and as Mr. Clarence Bennimore moves on to the little wicket leading into the dusty road, he orders his traps to be sent after him to the "Firs."

"A hat-case, black valise, and rug."

"Yes, sir! All right, sir." And the man bows and scrapes at every word.

Clarence smiles, well pleased. He is flattered by the man's manner; he loves power and delights in ruling.

As he moves away with a quick step, one can see there is nothing soft and dreamy about him; he is sharp and decided. While his brother Godfrey talks of doing a thing, Clarence does it, provided always that the thing to be done is for his own pleasure or benefit.

There are just the two of them at the "Firs," and Godfrey, eldest son of the late Squire Bennimore, talks of seeing the world. He is strong and big, and, I fear, indolent. His friends advise him to marry and settle down, but he "pooh poohs" this advice, and says Clarence may have the start of him in matrimony.

The young men had lost their mother previous to their father's death, and they had no sisters to soften and refine their nature; and young men think such talk "manly."

Clarence was by far the cleverer of the two brothers, a dark-eyed sallow-faced young man, who was often taken, not a little to his own satisfaction, for the "master." He found the country too lonely, and spent much of his time in London, where he managed to see "life," while his brother spent the time in a more innocent and healthy way.

The younger brother's taste lay towards the law,

and some day he would eat his dinners and make a mark ! He had many acquaintances about the Courts. One of these was young Finch, or as the fellows preferred to call him, from his straw-coloured hair and complexion, "Chaff" Finch. They were knowing birds, the Finches, father and son. The older bird, known as "Bull" Finch, advised his son to keep his country friend to himself, so he got rooms for Clarence in Brick Court, where they saw "life" together. The seeing was sometimes rather expensive ; but Godfrey answered all calls made upon him, until Clarence began to think himself entitled to have all his wants supplied, and it was with anything but pleasure he heard some whispers which might lead to the cutting off of his supplies. So he went home with his mind made up to prevent his brother "making a fool" of himself ; and if he knew anything of Godfrey there was a fair chance of success.

For he was shy almost to a fault, and, for a man, perhaps too much afraid of "words." He was very good-tempered, and hated to touch on subjects which led to a difference of opinion between himself and Clarence ; and as they differed on almost every subject, he found reticence his best friend. He was naturally open as the day, but self-defence taught him reserve.

Their nearest neighbour was Squire Norton of the Clewbend, but an old antipathy kept the families apart. On the squire's death, his brother squire wished to heal old sores, and Godfrey met him more than half way, but Clarence haughtily drew back. The brothers had "words" over the circumstance, but, as usual, for peace' sake, Godfrey gave in ; he did not then think the whole stock of the Nortons worth a quarrel.

"I like Alec very well, and he can come here if he likes; I don't want the squire, so there's an end of it."

"I hope there is an end of it," replied Clarence. "I am not so green as to be blind to Squire Norton's 'little game;' he is ready to part with either daughter or niece."

Godfrey's honest face grew red as a girl's.

"Shame, Clarence, to talk of ladies so."

"I am not talking of the ladies—I am only talking of the squire's views."

And it happened, as it always did, that clever Clarence had the best of it, and went back to London easier in his mind about Godfrey, who in time, he hoped, would allow himself to be led quietly.

He was proud of his achievement, and confided to his friend Finch his opinions concerning his own cleverness. Sitting before a good coal fire, with the third bottle of wine before them, he felt it a fitting time to show some of the mysteries of his great brain; and his friend was not slow to blow the big bellows of flattery while the great master brought forth wondrous sounds of his own creation. Mr. Finch rather thought he had attained the "art" of flattering, and the man who gave him such wine was entitled surely to his best!

Clarence had his rooms looked after by a young woman who had done the same for his predecessor. She never was to be seen except morning and evening, and was probably engaged in some occupation during the day. A fine, well-made young woman, on whose complexion, however, the London smoke was writing its own dark tale. She was very reserved, and seldom

spoke in going in or out—her voice was never raised in laugh or joke with butcher or baker's boy. But anyone looking into her heart at times would see every chord and fibre quivering to the touch of the dead past. She had lost much, she was doubly an orphan, for she had lost hope in her life. Her eyes looked hard and sad.

On Sundays in the dingy room, she would sit and picture the country where she was born. The fields, golden with buttercups, or crimson with vetch; the turned-up earth smelling of purity and plenty; the hay fields scenting the air—and the lanes!

"Oh, the lanes!" she would sometimes cry out, with her hands firmly clasped, and flushing cheeks. The sweet narrow lanes bordered with the sweeter hedgerow. And in her picture she saw the spot where, on many a day, her hand would steal into the long fluffy nest, full of downy fledglings; the hands hastily withdrawn and clasped with delight; the hush of secrecy with which little toddling brothers and sisters were let into the mystery. The daily visit, until *the* day when the nursery was found deserted, and one here and there, but scantily covered, hopping out into the world; the father and mother watching eagerly, from a neighbouring branch, their brood's first start in life. Every Sunday this was the picture she sat and looked at as the tears welled up in her eyes, and this one day in the week she allowed herself the luxury of a good cry—she washed her heart in tears, as it were, and felt fresh to face the hard world again.

Once or twice Mr. Bennimore found her on his steps, with a look on her face which made him turn and look again, wondering of what she was thinking.

"Well dressed and happy," he thought, "that woman would beat Alice Harvey, grand as she is. I wish I could make her eye flash."

Mr. Clarence Bennimore generally contrived to do as he wished, and in time he had his desire, and in time, too, he saw her eye flash out its pleasure at his approach. Who can turn from a kind word spoken—a kind look given?

Not her surely who lives on the spare diet of the bitter past. She takes gratefully the food her soul hungers for. The flower is beautiful and pleasant—and the root? Ah, well! she troubles not over that. Our poor solitary is not an outcast; she has not sinned against any of the laws; she is naturally as pure as the sweet trickling rills she so often hears in her sleep. She has not found all men coarse and sensual. She is truthful herself, and she never suspects anyone of falsehood. And in her Sunday picture gallery of the heart the village church was not forgotten. The pleasant walk through fields and over stiles; the sweet music, and the good words; then the lingering in the old churchyard, the meeting with friends and companions. Oh! what would she not give for that church now? Here she never entered one; all were so big and grand and full—no place for the poor and the sorrowful.

Mr. Bennimore treated her kindly, and in so doing disarmed her of all suspicion, for what reason could he have but the promptings of his kind nature?

She did not guess that his value for her was somewhat as he would value a dog; finding a beautiful one on his door-step, he would coax it to follow him, and keep it so long as it afforded him pleasure, and then,

with no compunctions, turn it loose again. And this poor girl who set his rooms in order for him was fast becoming interesting, first from a wish to know of what she was thinking, that flashed in her eye, and made the face, though uneducated, at those times full of thought. So he began to speak to her a word in passing—but, oh! so kindly said—and as the days sped on, what wonder if she learned to wait and listen to his words, as the words of an angel? When he knew more of her, he asked her to meet him and have a walk in the gaslight, and he would show her the gay shops; but she coloured up and curtsied.

“No;” how could she be seen with a grand gentleman like Mr. Bennimore? And when he found she was not of the common sort, he was not ashamed to set himself to overcome her shyness, to watch her coming and going, so that he might not miss a word with her. And she?—she never checked the pleasure which flew into her eyes at sight of him, or the colour which glorified her sallow cheeks.

He gave her little simple presents, which she refused at first; but he explained to her that he should do the same if she were any lady of his acquaintance, and after a time she took them with “I thank you, sir.”

He was going home for a time, and his longest talk with her was in giving her charge of his letters and papers; and as she listened to all his wishes she felt sorry to lose her kind friend, even for a time.

“And now,” he said, taking the girl’s hand and pressing it in his own, “you must be very different to me after I return.”

She coloured and looked happy.

"I'll set you a task to learn while I am away."

"Oh, sir," she answered, "I am no scholar—oh, what shall I do!"

He laughed.

"You need not be a scholar to do it, Ruth; promise that you will learn to love me?"

"Oh, sir, do not ask it—it would be too easy!"

"I do ask it," he said, with the tone of a master; "and see that you meet me with the lesson well learned."

And looking into her eyes he went away.

She was herself the cause of his absence, for, while planning the greatest wrong against her, he saw that she was perfectly happy suspecting him of nothing that he meant to do, and this very trust in him hindered him. He would have kissed her many a time, but a look in her eyes always kept him back and made him cautious. And now, sitting in the train that bears him to the "Firs," he plotted and planned against this very simplicity in the poor friendless girl he had left behind him.

She sat in her dingy room, thinking of him and of his beautiful words, "Learn to love me!" Ah, well! she could take a holiday all the time he was away, for the lesson was learned already. He had taken pains it should be, and he knew it, and calculated on the effect his absence would have on her. He was away for a longer time than he had contemplated, for he had, as we know, to see after his brother Godfrey's affairs, lest that young gentleman should make a fool of himself. He also found some difficulty in maturing his plans regarding poor Ruth.

II.

BUT a clever man like Clarence will not let a difficulty stop him. Bidding good-bye to home once more, he presented himself late one evening at Brick Court. A glance round the room showed him he was expected; everything was in its place, a bright fire spluttering out its welcome, and flinging home shadows on the wall, A little pile of letters beside his chair, and beside them on the table a little glass filled with violets. Ruth loved the sweet flowers, the only friends which came to her unchanged from the past. She often laid out a penny in the purchase of a bunch, which she gently and carefully untied from their tightened bandage, watching their drooping heads revive, and their green leaves grow strong and firm in their bath of cold water. She loved flowers, primroses and violets, smelling of moss and shady lanes.

"Yes, no doubt of it," thought Clarence, "it is nice to be cared for." He was somewhat disappointed, though he smiled as he looked around him, for she was not in the room. He turned to the window. In a moment she was beside him.

"You are welcome back, sir!"

"By Jove, she's splendid!" thought Clarence, meeting her for the first time decked in her new joy.

"Have you come to say your lesson?" he asked, taking her two hands into his; but not waiting for a reply, he went on: "I expect Mr. Finch in, a few minutes, on business; but Ruth, promise me, you will not go away, but wait till he leaves—then I shall hear your lesson and talk to you."

She walked about under the dingy trees, waiting her

master's summons. She felt so happy now he was come ; all the time he was away she had repeated her lesson over and over—"I love you, I love you," but would she be able to say it when called on ?

A little later master and pupil met, and the lesson somehow was said between them.

He kissed her, and told her he loved her truly, and would make her his beautiful lady, and take her to all the gay places, and they two should be happy as the day was long.

"I don't know how I got to believe it," said Ruth ; "I'm afraid it can't be true."

"What can't be true ?" he asked smiling.

"That you love me," she answered, with a rush of colour to her cheeks at her own happy audacity.

"I do love you."

"Truly ?"

"Yes, truly."

"Will you swear it ?"

"I swear it." And he did.

The girl sighed heavily, as if relieved.

"Thank you, sir. I ought to be the happy girl." And she arose to go away.

"You are not going ?" he said, taking her hand.

"Oh yes, sir, it is time."

"Time for what ? Do you know that when two people say they love each other, there is no more parting ; you will stay with me, now and always."

She tore her hand from his, and was at the door in a moment—at the door to find it locked !

Though a simple country girl, she was not without her woman's wit, and seeing him leave his chair, she

snatched up a knife from the table, and with pale cheeks and flashing eyes she bid him open the door or she would bury it in her bosom.

He could not doubt her word, for the woman before him was capable of much—so transformed was she, that he felt afraid almost to stir, or break the charm in the least.

“What an actress she would make !” he could not help thinking, as she fixed her eyes upon him imperious and commanding.

“Go round that side, sir ; and when you unlock the door, go back again to your chair.”

It was no longer Ruth, the poor drudge, paid to do her master's bidding, but a queen who spoke to him, and he gazed in wonder at what he had roused. He admired her more than ever, and feared his clumsiness had indeed frightened her ; but he knew if he could only get her to listen to him, he might yet win all. He was eloquent with his tongue, and never found a stumbling block to its smoothness. A little truth would last him a lifetime, for he made very meagre use of it : the atoms he did use were rolled in lies, like pills, to make them palatable. He generally said all that was befitting, and in charity I must admit he was often ignorant of his own powers ; all he seemed to know was that he was irresistible. So he paused by the chair, and addressed her.

“I mean you no harm ; put down that knife. I will open the door and let you out, but I want first to tell you that you have mistaken me altogether.”

“So I find,” she answered bitterly, still keeping hold of her weapon.

"To-morrow, when you are calm, I shall tell you what I really mean. I do love you, Ruth, and will do anything to prove it. I worship you. Only promise me now, that you will not go away and leave me ; without you, I should die or go to the d——"

Ruth shuddered and dropped her eyes.

"If the door had been open, you would never again have seen me in this world, sir ; and who knows, but it might be best for both ? But maybe I did wrong you, sir, so I will hear what you have to say *then*."

And she passed out like a shadow, and left him alone.

She had not mistaken his meaning, though he chose to say so. He had merely thrown out a feeler, and seeing how it was met, he saw that his other and safer plan must be resorted to ; he was sorry he had laid himself open to her suspicions—he loved her in his own low way, and he would win her after the same low fashion.

Men of the Clarence Bennimore stamp find helpers according to the job—filthy tools for filthy work. Turning down his gas, he betook himself to one of these familiars, who lived in one of those innumerable streets which lie around Queen Square ; he found the man he was in search of, and after half an hour's talk, carried on in low tones, he seemed satisfied with his "friend," and prepared to leave, first folding up a paper, which the other had produced early in the interview.

"Fear nothing, sir ; bless ye, one of them sort glide into the net as easy as sprats," remarked the bullet-headed occupant of No. 2, in an encouraging manner. Mr. Bennimore deigned no reply ; taking up his hat from the measled oil cloth, he said, putting it on,

"If you hear nothing in the meantime, you will be

with me at six o'clock. Make yourself up to look smart, and the 'thing,' you know; and remember, not a drop taken: the girl is sharp and suspicious, I can tell you."

"Trust me, sir, I never spoiled any gen'leman's 'little game;' straight hair, eyes inclinin' up'ards, white tie ever so leetle rumped—if that's not the ticket my name's not Joe Sloper. Good-night, sir; good-night!"

The parting guest was not in a very amiable mood; however, he responded to the other's good-night, and then relieved himself with a curse, "D— you, you are earning your guineas easily."

Mr. Sloper saw his friend was ruffled, and he stroked him down with his reply, "Risks, sir, risks, as there is in all business."

The "licence," for that was what Mr. Bennimore carried home with him, was an unfilled form of register for chapels, and owing to the poor girl's want of education they trusted to dupe and deceive her, even if she did spell out a word. Mr. Bennimore looked to the Royal Arms at the top of the sheet, and the word "marriage" very conspicuously embodied in it, to convince her of its genuineness. He walked across the Park, picturing to himself how she would look on the morrow when he showed it to her. It had lain in his pocket while she doubted him! But he chose to keep it for a glad surprise with the new day.

In the morning she came, and would have passed his door, but he opened it and drew her in. He felt differently towards her since the previous night; he respected her, and thought her worthy of his love, so he was radiant and demonstrative, and giving her no time either for doubt or suspicion, he spread out the sheet

minutes, to the simple eyes of the only unspotted soul among them, this man had forged and rivetted, with the authority of holy words, a golden link which bound them in life-long bonds. Perfectly happy and trusting, she turned to her husband and gave him his heart's desire.

The minister and his man departed, and they were left alone.

He took rooms for her; he decked her with ornaments, had her russet hair dressed by a friseur, delighted in her, took her to the operas and theatres, revelled at her ignorance and childlike wonder in all he showed her. She would have been content never to leave her room, putting it in order, filling it with flowers, listening for his step, sweeter music to her ear, than any she had ever heard; waiting upon his words, remembering his lightest wishes, this was all she asked. At times she trembled at her happiness, and felt it was too much. Was it all real? or would it fade as a vision? But it was overdone and could not last. He had been from home some days, her week's rent was due, and her landlady urged payment, as "folk like her" might change quarters some fine day.

From one word to another it came at last, and Ruth found she was looked on as "no better than she should be." Old Mrs. Webster, like a canny Scot, was only looking after her own, and wondering if the young woman was as innocent as she seemed, she talked still more. "Oh ma'am," said Ruth at last, "I'm not what you take me for. No, thank God, I have my 'lines'!"

"Oh, that indeed! if they bean't false, you're lucky, you are; many's the one had that cry."

Perhaps the doubt could not help creeping into Ruth's mind; it came there with the sound of the word "false," and going to her box she took out the paper and brought it to the old lady, asking her to satisfy herself.

"Oh, Lord!" groaned the old woman, as she spread it on her knee, under the keen scrutiny of her glasses; "them lines!" she went on, "surely some young gentlemen be very wicked. God pity you, poor thing, if you strove to be honest; but they're a match for the like o' you, that they are."

And she clattered out, leaving Ruth and her "lines" together. With bursting heart she bent over the words, here and there spelling out a hope. At the top stood the letters "V. R.," which always comforted her. Who would dare trifle with them? But she made very slow progress in her spelling, for by the time she had got the meaning of one word, she had forgotten that which went before, so the sense was lost; but with a hopeful gleam in her poor perplexed eyes, she did manage to spell out the word "marriage." And then she scanned her own and his signature, and thought of the day when he had taught her to trace those letters. Oh, after all that had passed between them could he be false?

She knew his step would soon fall upon her ear, and she sat on where the old woman left her, the little bunch of violets growing drooped and limp beside her hand—and so he found her, and knew the time was come when he was to turn her adrift.

She threw herself at his feet, and raising the paper, she cried in cold, hard, but agonising tones:

"Once before I doubted you, and you told me I was

wrong ; tell me so again when I doubt this paper, read it for me, and remember God knows all."

"Get up!" he said shortly, "being on your knees won't make it either false or true; get up and have sense, and I will read it for you."

She began to trust him once more, got up, and sat down quietly at the other side of the table.

He opened it out and read it through ; for once truth suited him, and he used it, neither altering nor changing one word. It sounded well, she thought, and she listened, still listening and waiting with clasped hands and parted lips. He stopped, folded it up deliberately, and put it on the table.

Hope had brought her heart to her lips, and now, crushed and bleeding, it fell within, her never more to rise in this life.

"Is that all?" and her voice was strangely low.

"That is all, and you see it is harmless enough," he said.

"You deceived me, and I am not your wife?"

"You are not my wife ; but that makes no difference between us. I will not desert you as long as you are sensible and reasonable."

She flushed up scarlet all over face, and neck, and hands, then grew ghastly white.

"I was very foolish to think you would marry a poor girl like me," in the same low voice.

"Come, now, that's sensible ; yes, very foolish indeed. Think no more about it, but get me my tea."

Still white and trembling, she groped her way out, and the landlady presently brought him what he required.

"Where is she?" he asked, with a smile.

"The poor creature is sobbing on her bed, sir."

"Oh, a sulk," he said, turning to help himself.

When Ruth left the room she brought the paper with her, and thinking, in her despair, that he who deceived once might deceive twice, she bid her landlady read it for her; and she did, word for word, and finished, God help her, without the words her heart waited for.

"I will go to bed." And there the old woman heard the pitiful moaning late into the night.

In the morning Clarence found the clothes he had bought for her laid upon the bed—the presents and trinkets, even to the pretty slippers—all were there. Whilst the day was breaking she was collecting them. then going to a little old box, she took out the worn; honest garments of her working days, put them on, and once more stood in outward appearance what he had found her, but, oh, how changed! so changed that she could never be the same again. She slipped the ring off her finger, and laid it with the rest, then softly crept downstairs and out into the world once more, adrift.

Mr. Bennimore had come to the conclusion that he should have some trouble in getting rid of her. He was consequently spared much by Ruth's morning walk. He paid his landlady, made her a present of all the fine clothes, put the ring into his pocket—to fit some other finger perhaps—and set about his ambitious desires for himself, never caring, little heeding what became of her he had so often vowed he loved. Lest she might come back, he removed to chambers in

the Albany Court, and entered a new circle. Mr. Finch had missed the girl from her usual haunt, and he pretty correctly guessed the cause.

III.

BESIDE this picture of how Clarence Bennimore saw "life," let us give a companion one of his brother Godfrey. His nature was loving and sympathetic, and when he was many years younger than he is now, he had given the wealth of his love and thought to his mother—his beautiful dying mother. But for him she would have been left to the kind, but not loving care of servants. And the weaker we any of us are, the more we need love. His father was a sporting squire, and wished his sons to grow up manly fellows, not hanging about women's skirts. He did not believe in the beauty of love, its presence only made a fellow "soft," as Godfrey undoubtedly was, in his mind, to prefer his mother's noiseless chamber to a jolly run with the pack. To do him justice, he may not have thought his wife was dying; but his son knew it, and many a day he would ride out with father and brother to escape their jokes, and at a fitting opportunity he would turn his horse's head homewards, and come and sit by her, who, too weak to move into the sunshine, would lie all day wistfully gazing at it, as it played amid the many branches of the grand old elm which shaded her window. This elm was a never-ending delight to her, beautiful in the calm sunshine quivering through its leaves, and grand when the storm-king swayed it.

She always met her favourite son with a smile, and her heart came into those great eyes of hers, as they turned on him fondly.

"Godfrey, you seem to bring health and strength in with you; you are so strong and big."

"I am strong, mother; I wish God would give you half of it, I'd never miss it, and you—oh, mother, it is hard to see you lying there and not be able to do something for you."

"I trust Him in everything, my son. He would give me strength if He saw fit. I am content with His love and yours. I believe you do give me half of everything you possess," she said, drawing down his face to her—"your strength, your love, your time."

"All my love, mother, all my love."

Then taking her, with gentlest care and pity, in his strong arms, he carried her down the corridor, and stood with his light burden at the western window till she saw the sunset flush the old beech wood. The tears stood in both their eyes, as Godfrey turned and came back slowly—the same thought, perhaps, was in both their hearts too.

He never grudged his mother those hours. He knew they would be his strength and comfort in the years to come. He could not make Clarence see that there was any danger.

"You know, Clarry, the doctor has been doubtful of her recovery all through."

"Oh, he is never anything but doubtful. I say, old fellow, will you come to the meet?"

"No," said his brother, decidedly, and flushing with pain at the carelessness in Clarence's manner; and

hoping to save him regret at some future time, he continued, "I shall stay with my mother. You had better go to her before you go out, or you will be sorry when it's too late."

"Well, I'll go, old boy; but all the same you are a 'Molly Coddle.' See if we don't have the mother out again with the spring flowers."

The boy went, meeting his father coming out with tears in his eyes.

"Your mother is very 'low,'" he whispered. "Don't stay long; follow me by the Clewbend. I mean to send Harty up. I believe that old fool, Bolus, is frightening her."

And he sent Harty up and rode off, conscious of having done his duty. Father and son had a splendid day's sport, and rode home full of spirits, laughing boisterously at times over some mishaps which they had witnessed.

"Go and tell Godfrey all about it; you'll find him by his mother," said the squire, who always waited to see Scotto rubbed down and set to his grub.

And Clarence came, but did not find Godfrey. Never more would he sit by his mother on this earth.

Two hours ago he had laid her down for the angels to take up, and she was gone. She clung to him while life lasted, not fearing to go, but unwilling to leave him, and her last memory of earth was the pressure of his warm lips, and who knows but she will awake and remember in another life than this? He laid her down, sorrowing, not for her, but for himself; and as he passed from the presence of Death, a voice seemed to thrill through him and shape itself into words:

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." He shut himself up, and, for the first time in his life, knew what it was to be alone. He had loved his mother devotedly, and she had sympathised with his lightest trouble. With her, life was ever bright and beautiful; without her, all seemed dark and black before him.

So we all think, when sorrow finds us, at his age. We are crushed and broken, and things will never look the same again. But time, and other losses, it may be, greater and keener, teach us that we have lived over our first grief, and that flowers will bloom on the soil of sorrow.

The squire seemed stunned for a time, though why would be hard to say; for he had been told, and everyone else had seen for months, that "sweet Mrs. Bennimore" was "fading away." He had an idea that Death is a noisier and fussier thing than it sometimes is. He knew nothing of this gliding into heaven—fussing and fretting, and hard-riding for advice he could understand, and at the last, resignation; but here it was all resignation. And if he put his thoughts into words, it would be that his wife had died of it. That he loved her after his own fashion no one ever doubted; and all who witnessed the funeral could testify to it. "No expense spared" was what everyone said, and everyone was there; for the gentle lady, who lived retired more from want of health than want of sociability, was still well and widely known, from the many kind offices which were done so quietly as almost to hide the giver in the gift. But kindness, like

other things, "will out," and now almost every cottage mourned a friend.

After a proper time had passed, the eldest son joined father and brother as often as they wished. Indeed, he was as keen a sportsman as either; but just as he was careful to preserve his horse and himself from broken bones, so, over his own moral being he felt he had, and would keep, a healthy control. The squire was a hard rider and a hard drinker. He patronised all the "meet" dinners of the season, and too fully, for his own sake, patronised the crusted port and golden sherry. Clarence was growing fond of these dinners too.

"One meets one's betters there," seemed all the reason he had to give; and Godfrey quietly answered, "Yes, and one meets one's other thing there, too."

And now the squire's sons were men, and doing their best to make him old; and Godfrey had his thoughts on many things, and wished to travel a little, having got the idea from some of his friends, that a man is not competent to give an opinion on any one subject until he has seen something besides his own country.

But his father would not hear of it. "I never travelled, and why should you? When you are your own master you can do as you like—not till then!"

And the squire little thought how soon his son would be in a position to please himself.

After one of those "first-rate affairs," at Hacklebury, the Earl of Tallyho in the chair, Squire Bennimore mounted his horse in a state of complete inability to guide it, and there was no one clear-headed enough to stop him. With a shout to his good horse Scotto, he set off; what wonder, if the horse, the more human

of the two, galloped along, eager for his oats and his bed—galloped away, instead of waiting till some sane person led him. Scotto was as good a horse as ever stepped, and as wise as any horse ever was. Late hours did not suit Scotto; why wonder that he did not stop, and make them later still? However it was, when the horse reached home there was no one on his back, but a heavy weight had turned the saddle round, and a large foot was firmly caught in the stirrup, and the bald head, fringed with white hair, was bumping and bleeding against the stones.

“Dragged home,” as many a one is, but not so mercilessly as Scotto dragged his master. Poor brute! he stood like a lamb whilst they relieved him of his insensible burden, then turning quickly round, he looked at his old master and neighed loudly as he was led off to his box. And Godfrey took his seat by his father’s bedside, and doctors came and went, not giving much comfort, for they knew he was beyond their skill. He lay, with closed eyes and heavy breathing. No one could tell what the soul thought, thus imprisoned in the falling ruins of its earthly abode. Unseen agency was at work for its liberation, and once free, the rub-bish would be carried away. One day the breathing stopped. The doctor was having his luncheon with Clarence, of jugged hare and claret.] He came in answer to Godfrey’s hasty summons—felt the place where the pulse used to beat, shook his head, remarked in a low tone that “all was over,” and went back to finish his meal. Godfrey thought of another death-bed, and laying his father’s hand reverently down, he seemed to say to himself, “Which of those two death-

beds shall be mine ?" Clarence rode with the hounds as usual, and thought it was fear which kept Godfrey at home, and despised him accordingly. But the truth was that for some months before his father's death, a change was visibly creeping over the young man. He was casting his shell, and I believe in all cases this is a painful process.

He was often to be seen with a book sticking out of the pocket of his shooting-jacket, and if you pulled it out you would oftener find it "Tennyson" than "Tacitus." Primroses were beginning to be more to him than spring flowers, poetry breathed in the air around him, and the sweetest poetry he ever read came to him modestly from a pair of violet eyes, the fringed lids shaded his heaven, and when these were raised and he was taken in to them Godfrey was happy. And his heaven, need I say it, was Alice Harvey, Squire Norton's niece. What is the use of telling how they first met—how their eyes met and flashed each other's future? Of course they couldn't help meeting, and soon they found they couldn't help loving. And after his father's death, when the young squire had taken to fishing, they met still oftener. For everybody should know that the best trout-pool is at the Clewbend. The Nortons are proud of their little river, and those who were before them must have been proud of it too, for they had named their place after it. This bend is a good quarter of a mile from the bridge, and though it is the river's narrowest part, it is, at the same time, its deepest. And here Godfrey employed himself, after getting Squire Norton's permission, in constructing a little rough block bridge, which,

when finished, added to the many accidental meetings, the young ladies hailing it with delight as a near cut to Hacklebury. Godfrey's worship stole over him quietly. He had not questioned himself as he went along, and when he did pull up it was not to fuss over the unlocked door, but to procure an opportunity of telling his divinity where she was enshrined. As if she did not know! Alice knew she was beloved. We are none of us ignorant of it, and instead of tantalising him with doubts to order—without even a "let me see"—for had she not seen all along?—she took what he offered, and in its stead placed sweet hope, and sweeter trust, and sent him forth a king. Yes, she had crowned him—and he? "Leal and loyal to the death." This was his coronation oath.

But clever Clarence did not approve. He thought he saw it all when he saw what annoyed him. It did not suit him that his brother should settle down, and knowing his horror of "words," he trusted to use them cunningly and skilfully for his own ends. Godfrey was becoming "dodging" and "deceitful" in his brother's eyes, and required watching. He often did turn the conversation rather than admit he had been with Alice; he could not bear to have her name brought into their wordy encounters.

There is much of this shrinking from what is unpleasant in many fine and manly natures. Anything short of a lie to keep free from the avalanche of stinging bitter words. But if Godfrey knew to what his silence would lead, he would have turned a very lion on his brother's path. He had the lion in his nature, and perhaps knowing this

prevented him slipping the chain for trifling causes. He resolved to travel, as he had often before resolved, and ended by going fishing, and meeting the young ladies from the Clewbend. He had learned to live for the blink of a bonny eye, and the bonny eye rested on him—we may as well tell the truth—as lovingly as any hungry heart could wish, and the sweet face paled as Godfrey told his intention.

“A fellow grows too soft at home—one should go out, if only to get kicked,” and he laughed.

Miss Norton, who was possessed of rather an independent turn of mind, and a strong love of adventure, thought the young squire was right, and she said so. Then he turned to sweet Alice Harvey, but she spoke not a word; her face was pale, and her fingers mechanically picked each beauteous petal from the rose she held, and the wind took each as it fell and bore them out of sight. They walked on a little way, then stopped to say “good-bye.” Miss Norton caught sight of a bit of bryony peeping from the hedge-row, and as she stepped aside to get it, Godfrey caught and imprisoned Alice’s hand, and looking into her face, he asked, “Shall I go?”

She let him keep and press the hand he held, as if her thought had borne her forward, but as he dropped it, she seemed to be recalled to the present, and whispered in a low tone,

“Don’t go.”

It was enough for him. [He went home in a tremble of happiness. He was so full of his joy that he shouted it in snatches of happy song as he strode home by the river’s brim. But there was a cloud

above him, and after dinner the storm broke, and the thunder of his brother's fury was showered over patient Godfrey's head. He listened to it all, keeping himself in check, for the memory of her who bore them. He would not desecrate their hearth by a brother's quarrel, nor would he exert his power as master, and turn this angry madman from his father's house. He hoped Clarence would, one day, be ashamed of his words. As for himself, he would go away; yes, even with her words still warm in his heart, bidding him stay. Propriety would cry out if he married so soon after his father's death, and stay he could not, to have his doings watched and his steps followed.

He could go away happier if Alice granted his wish. What that was he meant to tell her, and under the circumstances would she hesitate? he thought not. He did not see it from any point of view but his own. He rose at daybreak, unrested and unrefreshed, and spent hours in thinking over the short note which lay addressed to his love; in it was embodied "Love's request." He was in a passion of love, and never asked himself was it generous? or was it even necessary? Love is sometimes a good reasoner, and it was in this case.

He told her of his resolution; why it was imperative on him to go—his agony at the thought.

"But Alice," he wrote, "do not let me go away doubting; let me make you mine. It will be a comfort to me when absent; it will bring me back; or, if it is otherwise ordained, you will know and come to me in heaven. Miss Norton will help you, and

keep it secret. If you consent I will join you, any day you name, in Leconfield."

And the note was received and wept over—blotted and blistered with tears. Alice hated to do this thing. "No good ever came of a secret," she often said; but though the petition was hateful, the petitioner was dearly loved, and faithfully trusted; and she came, with swollen and tear-stained face, to her friend and cousin, Mary, carrying her precious love-letter, over which the two girls discussed the whole affair. Mary knew well the temper and disposition of both the brothers. The mother's son was Godfrey, and Clarence was his father's.

"What is it he wants you to do?" inquired Mary; and Alice told her. He had spoken of it to her before. "It will be nothing you know, dear, in our eyes but a binding engagement. He does not see that to wish for it implies a doubt of me; no, he says it is others he doubts. Oh, I cannot bear to do it, and yet—Mary——"

"He will never believe you love him if you refuse; he will go away hopeless, and you may never forgive yourself, for he has a fine nature."

"Then, Mary, you advise me——"

"To comply with his wishes. He should not have asked you, but as he has, you have no alternative if you love him."

"If I love him," said Alice, raising her eyes to her cousin's face, and the two girls kissed each other. Squire Norton never suspected anything—why should he? when his daughter informed him that she and Alice were going to Leconfield for a few days' shopping. He was wealthy, and his daughter was the light of

his life. He was ready to encourage and pay for any wish or whim of hers, and the rooms over Miss Nash's millinery establishment were always at her service. Miss Nash, having lived with Mrs. Norton for years as maid, found no qualms about dislodging any occupant of the front drawing-room for her "young ladies." And here, one morning, Squire Bennimore joined the ladies, and they went out together.

It was altogether a tearful, trembling transaction, and when Miss Norton witnessed the parting, she was sorry she ever allowed herself to give her consent. Two happy hours husband and wife spent together, and Godfrey felt his very soul separated as he kissed his almost insensible wife. She clung about his neck; she could not let him go; she did not hide her love, but cried wildly, "Oh, Godfrey, stay with me, I love you so."

He must go now, and yet, each time he reached the door, it was only to come back and throw himself at her feet, and feel the torture of love like theirs.

At last Miss Norton forbade his return. "It is childish—it is cruel!" she cried, "to torture her so. Go, and leave her to me."

And with head bowed he went out softly, closing the door behind him, without looking back.

Alice returned to the consciousness of being very miserable, and to much beside. In sober, quiet thought she felt that she had done wrong, and yet, knowing this, were all the incidents of the past week to be gone over again, she knew that she would act the same. Women are unselfish, no doubt of it; to make

her life's lord and love the happier was her duty as well as privilege.

Miss Norton was one of those rare women who can sympathise with, and comfort you, without, at the same time, telling you you are "awfully wrong." She, too, had a pretty strong idea that she had done wrong in advising and countenancing her cousin's conduct; but if to do again she, too, was willing to do it, and never desert a friend.

IV.

GODFREY had his way as we have seen—say it was a selfish way, if you will. Are we not all selfish? especially where we love—and he went away with a heavier heart than he thought he should ever bear. He went out from her, shutting the door behind him, without looking back. In after years how often did he, mentally, turn and look into that room and see the beautiful face, good beyond earthly beauty, which he had saddened, the sweet look of tender entreaty in the clouded eyes. Godfrey is gone on his travels, and the younger brother, delighting in the name of "master," held the position. He felt born to rule, and servants and farm-labourers were not bad to begin with. And Mary Norton and Alice Harvey went back to the Clewbend, but neither of the girls were as merry as the old squire expected them to be. He solaced himself, however, with one of his stock phrases, that "Birds are always a little ticklish at the moulting;" and Alice, with no heart for it, had to enter into his merriment and give him occasion, by her saucy answers, for relieving his facetious feelings by repeated

salvos of laughter. He loved his niece, and cherished in his heart the desire that she should be his son Alec's wife—the young man would take the gift with thankfulness; but he never troubled his cousin with much love-making. Mary knew this would never be; for once, when it was mentioned by her, Alice had said hurriedly, "Now hush, dear; you know I could never bear to be the mother of cousin's children."

Godfrey had taken it into his head that this was to be the family arrangement, and seized with a sort of jealous frenzy—a complaint common to lovers—he would gladly have hidden away his jewel in his heart, to be kept there till such time as he would bring her forth as his crown of rejoicing, to be worn before all men. It was not want of confidence in her or in himself; if any need required, he could love her and wait for her a Jacob's length, just as through life he looked to heaven. His plan of travel was formed so that he might become more worthy of her love, and the thought of her was his companion night and day. He was very much in love—I question if not too much. I know this, that if any other subject so constantly engrossed his thoughts, it would, in all probability, have made him famous. Whether leaning back in the corner of his carriage, or sitting in the spare clean parlour of the Pension at Vevey, he has only to shut his eyes and they open inwardly upon Alice. He calls her by the most endearing of epithets, and holds long conversations with her. He never before knew how personally present love brings its object. He could write to her every day, only that he could not ask her to take that long walk to Hacklebury post-office so often, where

they had arranged his letters were to be called for ; and on the appointed days he watched her in thought, and heard every footfall of her dainty feet, until, leaving the public road, she took the path by the willow-banked river, which was her shortest way, and crossing over Godfrey's rustic bridge, she would find herself in the Clewbend wood. Did he think, when busy in its construction, how often he would cross it with her in thought ? Perhaps she was the first motive which prompted him in his work : we often keep from ourselves the name of the real architects of many of our fancies.

Clarence seemed to be busy putting the people and things about him to rights. To be right, everyone's clock must strike with his, and, strangely enough, now he had gained his end, in separating Godfrey and Alice, he seemed to be quite as assiduous as his brother in finding out the way she went. He could not mount the rod and line, for he was no fisherman ; but most assuredly Alice never came back from her pleasant post-office excursion, at this time, without encountering him at some point or other on the way ; and he was always more willing to speak than she was to listen.

One day he met her with the little allurements, " I have just had a letter from Godfrey."

But as Alice felt a precious ditto resting in her bosom, which she was hastening to devour in her den, she was not over-polite to his little attentions.

" I will not detain you," he said, quick to see she was in haste ; " but I thought you would be interested

in hearing something of him, he always spoke of you in the highest terms."

"Oh," said Alice, colouring up, "I shall, indeed, be glad to hear of him. I thought," she went on, looking at him with her bright smile, "that you were only tantalising me by holding the grapes above my head; now I am listening."

He had been commenting to himself on her bright colour and brighter eyes, and now, with a darkening look, he said,

"I suspect Godfrey has given you the grapes without my leave. He is a soft fool, and deserves to be taken in."

"Pray don't be impertinent, Mr. Bennimore," and drawing herself up to her full height, she passed him with a saucy look.

Had she seen the scowling look that followed her she could not have felt so light-hearted.

How hard it is to guess the workings of the human mind, more especially those of the plotting and planning turn. They never show a clue, and what you take for one is only a blind, to give them time for doubling.

Godfrey never guessed that his brother's unselfish warmth, in warning him off the preserve, was that he might occupy the ground himself; but that such was the fact I happen to know, for, during his last visit to London, it had come to his knowledge that his fair neighbour, as well as being beautiful, was rich—"entitled to something very handsome indeed," as only child and heiress of the late Major Harvey, of Silver-spring, near Chester. This news came to him from his

friend Finch, who knew all about it, and whose father had drawn up the will.

"Why don't you go in for that 'concern,' Clarrie?—neat, I should say, and handy. Far better to have done that, and to have let that girl alone, man."

Clarence twirled his watch-chain round his fingers, in a knowing style, then he answered the first part of his question.

"Because I've had no chance; Goddy has got the start of me there."

"Chance!" mimicked the attorney; "don't talk of chance—success, man, that's it, and will be yours, or I'm much mistaken in you."

This is a sample of the junior Finch's talk to his friend; he always impressed that individual with an exalted idea of his own excessive cleverness. Too much conceit will spoil the best of us; how, then, when mixed with the vulgar thoughts and doings of a commonplace man, for intellectually Clarence was no more than this, and we know what his moral standard is. He had picked up a big way of talking, and had got the wise, confidential tone which deceives so many. People listened to his advice, and then went and took their own, which each of us finds the very best. Now, Clarence wanted money, and it was slow getting it from the "Firs," with a large establishment to be kept up, and Godfrey taking a fair share just now. Their father had not been very frugal, and the estate wanted looking after to bring it back to a healthy power of producing. So long as he had nothing to do with farming, he did it well, and on every occasion was ready to say what ought to be done; but when it

came to his turn to act, he was astonished to find how difficult it was. He wanted money without working for it, and where could he get a prettier purse than that his friend suggested to him? He knew Alice Harvey was beautiful, but he also knew that she did not glance at him as he had often seen her do at his big, honest brother. He did not love her; she must learn his value first, after that there would be time enough for him to begin his admiration. His code, at the best, did not place woman very high; his wife he intended to "keep the house;" and he had no idea of any man of sense asking the advice of any woman.

"They would never have been created but that man wanted a 'maid;' and didn't he make a nice mess of it by taking her advice?"

He would like a woman, such as Alice Harvey, to do his bidding—look to him for everything in life, and from him receive the very liberty of thought. And his friend sent him home hot on the idea of "settling," taking some part in politics, and making a name for himself in the county. He was inflated with vanity, and thought it the swellings of genius. He knew he was a clever fellow, who got his own way; and would get it to the end. He trimmed and twirled his dark moustache, as he glanced at himself in the mirror; he smiled successfully as he looked. He was a short, slight young fellow, with a pale face, and dark hair; rather a Napoleonic style of face, as he often boasted to himself. Even in appearance there was nothing soft about him; he seemed made up of hard lines inside and out. When he laughed no mirth lit up his eye—no humour lurked about the corners of his mouth.

His laugh was as hard as his curse, but the latter had the advantage of naturalness. When Alice was his wife——. Something seemed to whisper within him, "Godfrey loves her." Psha! anyone would do for his soft brother—win her he would, he must, or if he didn't? Then neither would have her—his or no one's, "So help me God!" And this was his settled resolve. Ever since that day, when she was "hasty" with him, he had met her with such kindness that she felt quite ashamed of her suspicions, and smiled on him, and almost looked at him as she would at Godfrey, for was he not his and her brother?

One day he met her on her way to Hacklebury, and turning, as they walked along, he said,

"You seem to be fond of the sound of mills, to judge by the frequent visits you pay to the old place."

"There are many reasons to bring me here besides the sound of mills—one is always remembering some little want, in the shape of reels of cotton, and you must not forget that my Aunt Dodson lives in the 'old place.'"

"I know all that," he answered; "but I also happen to know it is not visits to the Dodsons you pay in Hacklebury."

"And how comes it, Mr. Bennimore, that you concern yourself with my affairs?"

"If you are interested in a person, you get to know more of their affairs, perhaps," he answered.

"Then I must beg of you not to be 'interested' in me or my doings; remember, if you continue to do so, I shall take it as an insult."

"Why take it as an insult from me particularly ? You would not take it so from Godfrey."

"That is quite different." And the sweet eyes sank beneath their modest lids, to hide the love in them at mention of his name.

"Why, and how ?"

The quick, sharp, suspicious tone of his double question showed Alice her error, in admitting there was a difference ; so, rather than allow the conversation to continue, she stood still, and turning toward him, said,

"I really cannot submit to be further questioned. I am, in some things, very independent, and if you please I shall say good-bye here."

"Good-bye, Miss Harvey, we shall meet again."

And turning quickly, he left her. Instead of going about his business, like the honest man he was not, he sneaked, like the coward he was, by a cross cut, as he often did before, and from his hiding-place watched his intended bride turn into the little post office ; then, grinding his teeth and muttering curses, he walked himself into a fury, lashed into a foaming madman by his own evil uncurbed passions.

Were his brother's broad shoulders, honest face, and pleasant smile to thrust themselves between him and his desire ? He would be master, in spite of fate, and he would bring that proud, flashing eye to sue for love. She would look grand in a passion. He seemed to have a mission for rousing woman's spirit. Ever since that day when his friend supplied him with the word "success," he had settled it with himself that she must be his. He would win—had he not sworn it ? He was too grand in his own eyes to ask a woman's love

—he would take it. And would he not make her eat humble-pie for all her haughty looks? He would love as he rode, keep a firm hand and tight rein, and trust him for taming the creature, even if he had to bury his spurs in the quivering flesh till they dripped with gore.

Some one has said that we each, at our birth, are provided with a good or a bad angel; both attend our steps, prompting or restraining our actions. Well for him who listens to the sweet voice on his right hand.

Clarence had turned from his good angel long ago, and was listening to, he knew not what, rancour and hate and malice and all uncharitableness.

Alice, a little later, returning along the same path, full of sweet thoughts, and smiling at some new term of endearment in that love-effusion which she was carrying home in triumph—smiling as she came—no wonder that she felt cross as she caught sight of Clarence coming to meet her: his strange, unwelcome talk annoyed her. Just as she had got on Godfrey's bridge, he met her from the other side, and so obliged her to stand still. The sun was sinking, and that beautiful peace-time of a country evening had come. The air was still, save for the bleating of the lambs, and the distant cry of the cow-boy. The birds were flocking home in troops, some crooning out their evening hymn as they stood upon the "gossiping doorstep."

"Is it not a beautiful time?" she said, her eye taking in all the varied beauty which made the picture perfect, and feeling so happy that for the moment she had forgotten the "dread" his presence filled her with.

"Lovely enough not to hurry away from it," he said hoarsely.

"I am not hurrying as I should," she said. "You forget how long it takes to walk to and from Hacklebury."

"It is a pity the post-office is not at this side, it would spare some time."

Alice was silent; she knew not what to say; he was insolent in thus persisting to speak of her affairs. In a moment he went on.

"Did it ever occur to you, Miss Harvey, that I sought your society for a particular object?"

"No, indeed!" she answered, not liking either his look or speech; "unless that, within the last couple of hours, I might have thought you wished to annoy me."

"I do not wish to annoy you—the very opposite of that;" and as he spoke his fingers twitched nervously, at his watch chain, and within him a voice kept repeating, "Tell her you love her; give her no time to think; quick! get her promise in a moment, and keep her to it for a lifetime; frighten her, quick!" And, lest he should waver in his wickedness, a strong hand seemed to push his better self aside, and a demon stood in his place.

"I love you, and you must listen to me."

Alice recoiled as if stung, but he as quickly followed and caught her hand, not caressingly but roughly, for he was fast losing his senses. She had become pale as death; but throwing back her head with an assumed courage, with the tears kept back from her eyes, she asked him what she had done that he should torture her so.

"Why should it torture you to be asked to marry me? You may not love me now, but promise you will do your best, and I will be content."

"You do not know what you are saying," she whispered. "Oh, pray let me pass."

"Answer me first. What objection have you?"

"I cannot answer as you wish; oh, Mr. Bennimore, you must have seen—you must understand——"

"I do not see why I *must* understand. Now, if I were Godfrey, you would not be so quick to run."

As he spoke her face blazed out flame, then paled again.

"Shall I tell you why?" she asked in a low, clear whisper; "because I love him."

She felt she must confess so much to him, and put an end to all this.

They were standing in the centre of the little bridge, their shadows plainly seen mirrored in the pool beneath, and no sound was stirring now but the cool splash of a young trout, as it leaped up to some sportive fly. As Alice spoke her companion's face took a threatening aspect, and in a rude, insolent tone he said,

"What right have you to love Godfrey? he never asked you, and does not want you. What right have you, I say?"

She spoke a word or two to him in a low, happy voice, flushing up at the thought her words presented.

In a moment of baffled rage he stood—one moment; then—how, was even a mystery to himself, but with a strong hand he pushed her roughly to the edge of the round block, then suddenly withdrew his hand,

and, as her slight form broke the placid surface of the pool, a short, sharp cry rose on the startled air, waking up the sleeping birds, and frightening them out into the evening again.

Assuredly Clarence did seem to have given place to the devil, who did his work well. He had vowed he would have his way, and he thought he had it, as, with a coward's swiftness, he fled from the place, and was lost to sight before the echo of her cry had ceased to vibrate. He never once halted or looked round, till he found himself safe under the spreading branches of the grand old elm at home. That good old tree had sheltered his house for ages, and now, as he sat beneath it, wet with the cold dew of terror, it did not fall upon him and crush him for his sin. No, it sheltered him, and waved above his head as it would above a better man, and cooled his raging blood, and in its shadows he sat and thought—what? that he was a murderer? Not a bit of it: he laughed aloud at the idea. What had he done? Nothing; it was Alice who had done it all. Those words her modest lips had framed called up the fiend within him. *It* pushed her, not he; who would call that murder?—nonsense. He could have called himself that hated thing if he had plotted and planned the act, but a sudden push in passion, that was another thing, quite; and so sitting as jury on his own act, the verdict was acquittal. This was the whispering of one voice, but there is another, and it thunders at his ear, "How could you leave her so?"

If he had saved her as quickly as he destroyed, right well he knew he would be forgiven.

But the first voice was more familiar to him, and suited him better. "Repentance! stuff! it was only for women and idiots!"

Well, no one saw him, of that he made sure, and for the rest, hundreds of people fall into rivers. Only the other day a young and pretty woman, married and happy, was found in a shallower river than the Clew, and no one was the wiser how she got there, and people said she did it herself, and people would say the same now. And all this time it seemed to him that he was not thinking these thoughts, only a listener to the voices within him. He crept into the house, but never turned a leaf of the clever book he took up; then he rang the bell, and told Mrs. Anderson, the housekeeper, that she might not send him up any dinner, as he had dined early with a friend. Seeing himself casually in the mirror, he started up, and struck his clenched hand against his brow. A something returned his look which he had never seen before, and when the light was out and he in bed, he felt the same strange thing was with him. He could not sleep, and went over all the incidents of the evening. When talking to himself he always admitted he was a bad fellow, who required some check to keep him from deeds of violence.

He remembered, years ago, when Godfrey and he were little, how they quarrelled over a penknife which the elder and stronger boy had won, and he knew, from the sudden filling of his heart with rage, then, that if he had had the means he could have killed his brother. He had stuck a knife through his leg, and though it lamed him for days, he bore the pain bravely, and

more bravely still, never once complained, knowing, if he did, that a heavy punishment would be dealt out to the culprit. And now, lying in his bed, he thought over every little circumstance, urging him on, until he came to the conclusion at last that, with his temperament and disposition, he could not help what he had done. He would very probably be called on, with others, to view the body, and he must help to come to a proper verdict. Of course it must be "Accidental drowning," with a suggestion to have the bridge removed—that is, if the bridge happened to be mentioned.

He could not sleep, and he could not lie there with his thoughts drifting him to hell. He had got an idea that he was not alone. More than once a sound, as of some trailing garment, made his heart cease to beat. Lighting his candle, he peered guiltily around, then arranging his writing materials, he sat down to write to his brother. The "Melancholy accident" was the topic he discussed, and with the additional knowledge he had gleaned, he wrote such a letter as perhaps might still further clear his way for him to the desired end. It never occurred to him that it would be more prudent to wait for a new day, instead of anticipating the news he alone knew of, but how often is it so? Your clever sinner, who guards his crime on all sides, will often leave one spot so unguarded that there is room to hang him in it, and Scotland Yard could easily find such a spot in this letter.

So wore the night away, and Clarence, notwithstanding his "big" talk, felt himself his own prisoner, and when the "fit" was on him, loaded himself with

chains, and flung his body into the dungeon of remorse, but, as a rule, he would not confess to such feelings. He had provocation—she drove him to it, with her sweet face and lustrous eyes—curse her! So you see in his very vague morality he acquitted himself, for had he not vowed a vow—and he always kept faith with himself—that his brother's she should never be? If not his, then, no one's; he could not rest satisfied with the poet's philosophy, "If she be not fair to me," etc. No; when he found he could not call her his, in his selfish and sinful pride, he dashed that sweet form to the ground, and exulted in its utter ruin. He dressed without once looking in the glass, but when he was ready to go out he turned fiercely, and stood face to face with his gaoler. It was more than he could bear, and throwing himself into a chair, he covered his face with his hands, and groaned aloud.

After breakfast he posted his brother's letter, and he felt everything swim round with him, as the post-mistress told him the whole story, standing in the shop, where he had come to have his letter stamped;—told him the whole story, differing materially from his in many points, as he unfortunately too well knew.

V.

BUT we had better go back with our readers; first, however, apologising humbly to Miss Harvey for not having sooner attended to her cry. As she stood before Clarence she felt, so surely as his hand grasped her arm, so surely was she lost; she saw that in his eye—madness, if you will—and her heart and thought

turned to Godfrey, who could not save her. She felt she must cry out, in the hope of some one hearing her, and with a sudden prayer heavenwards, she cried aloud, for the hour of her need was come. And the cry reached its destination, and lodged in the ear of her cousin Alec, who, rod in hand, was making towards the trout pool.

He was startled by hearing his cousin Alice's voice; he knew it, though it was raised in terror. Throwing away his encumbrances, he plunged through the thick undergrowth, and in a couple of seconds was at the open bend by the foot-bridge. Alec was right when he read the cry as one for help; the very water beckoned to him with a strangely-moved and troubled face. He sprang in, and another moment he and his unconscious burden were resting on the green bank. The young fellow was bewildered; seeing his cousin cold and still, he scarcely knew what to do. Help was the first thing, but how get her to the Clewbend in that state? "If Mary was here she'd know what to do," he said to himself. Remembering that there was a cottage near, he took up his dripping burden and hurried towards it. Alec felt as if he loved his cousin more than ever now that she lay so helpless in his arms, and he shuddered at the still closed eyelids and pale, sad face, which he covered with kisses, as much to bring the warmth of his face to hers, as to show his brotherly love.

Mrs. Hodge was just the sort of woman to come to; no raising of hands and eyes, with a "Did I ever?" She saw at a glance it was an accident, and it was well for Alec that no deeper feelings than a brother's

had taken possession of him, for the sweet lips parted, and the closed eyes unveiled for a moment to whisper the name of "Godfrey;" and "Cousin Alec" smiled as he plunged his ungainly legs through bush and briar once more, to summon his sister Mary, who in a little time was at the cottage. Alice was very weak and faint, but she would talk, and Mary must listen, though she strove to keep her quiet.

"Lie still, darling; you can tell me how it all happened to-morrow."

"I must tell you now, Mary, for I want your help."

And when all was told, Mary started up horrified.

"I will not yield to you in this, Alice; I will go to papa."

Alice bared her arm, and showed the black, discoloured mark she bore.

"This has made a coward of me. At first I thought it was broken, it pained me so, but it is only bruised."

"Do not ask me to help you in this, darling. You are weak and low now; let me act for you. I will be very cautious. Just think of what papa, and Alec, and all of us will feel. I cannot tell them, and I must see them suffer."

"I have thought of it all, Mary. He is clever, and unscrupulous; let him think his work complete, what matters it? A few months, and then—yes, Mary, I will hide away until *he* comes back. You will help me?"

Mary kissed her cousin long and tenderly, whispering, "I will help you, darling, and I pray God to help you too."

They had much more to say to each other, then Mary prepared to go, and come back again with things

necessary for the carrying out of the plan arranged between them.

"What will Alec think?"

"Dear Alec," repeated Alice, "how good he is; he will only think I was determined to finish what I had begun, you know," she said, with the ghost of a smile. "There have been such cases; 'determined suicide,' I think it is called."

So Mrs. Hodge was summoned, and told that Miss Harvey would occupy her room till the morning, and every precaution was taken by that bustling personage to ensure peace and quiet.

"She do want rest, Miss Mary. Lord sake, but she be gone white."

Before it was dark Mary came back again, bringing a change of clothes for the morrow's wear.

"Did you see her?" whispered Alice, as she sipped some wine her cousin had brought and insisted on her taking.

"Yes, she will be at your window at nine o'clock. Of course, dear, you can trust *her*."

The dress she brought was a mourning one, which Alice had but recently laid aside for her father; and when all was arranged, the two girls parted with kisses and tears.

In the meantime we shall introduce this expected personage to our readers, as she is to bear her part in the following history.

"Tib," as she was called by everyone, was a little black sprite of a woman, with black and melancholy eyes, short, black, crisp hair, a sort of tan complexion, and always, whether from choice or necessity, dressed

in black. She was everybody's body—now here, now there—nursing, sewing, taking charge of empty houses, disappearing for a month, or months together, and then popping up again, as some poor woman was struck down, or some workman had broken a limb. It was considered she had a genius for handling babies, and this no doubt accounted for her being indispensable at a christening—the most bashful of bachelor parsons never dreaded the ordeal if he caught sight of “Tib” bearing the long, white robes. She was an institution in Hacklebury and its neighbourhood. Miss Norton had found her this evening at the lodge, nursing the coachman's wife “out of friendship,” as she termed it. She walked out with the young lady, who told her errand.

“And you know, Tib, it must be a bit of a mystery.”

“And if it must, Miss Mary, who better to deal with it than Tib? All my life I loved a mystery; no wonder, for I'm one myself; I'm living with myself these—well, I'll not name numbers; but many a year we're living together, and I never heard from myself yet, either where I came from, or where I'm going to. Oh, Miss Mary, isn't life itself the great mystery of life?” and her dark eyes gleamed like diamonds in the fading light. The little woman was capable of deep feeling, and Miss Norton had a great admiration for her. She was a dissenter, and, for her class in life, pretty well educated; but most of her knowledge was “picked up”—every little crumb, no matter from what board it fell, was added to her store.

When Mr. Weston, the new vicar, came to the Clewbend parish, he found Tib awaiting him in his new

home ; and by her short, but graphic traits of character regarding his neighbours, he was saved from many an awkward mistake, consequent on all the parish being cousins.

"You see, sir," said Tib, introducing herself, as it were, "I'm a dissenter ; I don't know why, I'm sure, for my religion is without principles ; and mostly they tell me, sir, it's principles that makes dissenters."

"What, my good woman !" exclaimed her listener, aghast ; "you confess to having *no* principles ?"

"From your look, sir, I suppose I've said something wrong ; but,"— and the little black face shone with an inner light as she spoke—"my belief is of the very simplest, sir ; I am not learned enough for doctrines and principles. I believe in God the Father Almighty, and in Jesus Christ His only Son. I trouble myself no further ; and I often think, sir, that scholars know and believe too much sometimes."

Mr. Weston had changed places, for Tib was now preaching.

"Too true," remarked her congregation ; "but fearing to believe too much, take care of believing too little."

"I believe in work, sir, and that will keep us all from rusting, and believing too little—idleness is the mother of 'whims.'"

"I know what you mean, my good woman, and I do not think you are far wrong."

People who knew Tib, and who had her at their houses, thought her the most unselfish of creatures ; but she would tell you that this very sin was her heaviest cross to bear, and against which she prayed the

most. One of her perfections was that she was always clean. The small, shapely hand was as brown as a berry; but hands and nails were as carefully kept as a lady's, and her ears delicate and well shaped. It would be no easy task to judge her age by her appearance; at times she looked an old woman, and at other times, and these were the more frequent, she looked like a little girl. No one minded her goings and comings—she seemed above vulgar explanations; and when she bid her friends at the lodge "good-bye," no one ever thought of asking her destination. She might have been likened to the wind—no one telling whither it cometh or whence it goeth, but leaving the place the fresher for its passing over it. Walking rapidly into Hacklebury, she made some purchases; then, going to the railway station, she looked out one particular cabman, and engaged him to meet her at a particular hour at the minister's house; she could not go away for an indefinite time without a sight of her pet, the minister's one and motherless daughter, though she told herself it was Christian counsel she needed from the minister himself.

Now "Miss Nelly" was an enthusiast, and flew into sudden fancies for certain things and people. In her own way she "adored" Tib, and thought the little black face, when the lamps were lighted, worth looking at. I suppose it is true that love begets love; for such an amount of mutual petting went on between them as could not be tolerated in propriety's eyes. Mr. Harcourt thought Tib spoiled his daughter, and made her think too much of herself; while Tib said Miss

Nelly spoiled *her*, and made her think too much of *herself*.

"Now, look here, Tib." But this address did not seem to please the young girl, so she altered it to Tibbins, which seemed to satisfy both, if one judged by their radiant faces.

"Dear old Tibbins, love never spoiled any one, if it was good and true; and I should like to know why am I not to love and pet you, if I like. There's no one in the world, I do believe, loves me as you do: you saved my life, Tib, and I think I can never love you enough."

"God bless you, Miss Nelly! there is nothing in the world as dear to me as you are; but we must not let our love for each other lead us into sin."

"Into fiddlesticks!" laughed the young girl, in her face.

"So long as we keep from 'worshipping' each other, where's the sin? I warn you," she said, raising her finger, "not to talk cant; if you do, that moment I hate you."

"I have no time for quarrelling with my bird, so sit down beside me and tell me of yourself."

Nelly coloured up, and tears stood in her eyes.

"I have nothing to tell you of myself, only that I am very wicked, and can't be good."

"*You* wicked!" And Tib took the soft, plump hand of seventeen between her own. "Tell me, dear."

"I know it's wicked to have too small a belief; and I don't believe in any one but you, Tib!" And Nelly laughed again, and her eyes were all the

brighter for the tears. Tib knew that something had "crossed" her pet."

"Of course you are only talking of earthly beings, Miss Nelly; and I'm not sure but that you are laughing at me."

"I don't know;" and she spoke dreamily as if to herself; "but you see there are so few who seem to be good for goodness' sake."

"We dare not judge any but ourselves," said Tib, dogmatically.

"I *know* all that, Tibbins, darling; but one judges all the same, let it be right or wrong."

"The world is full of good people," said believing Tib.

"So good," laughed Nelly again, "that they are merely detained here while their wings grow."

Tib looked seriously troubled; she had not known her friend to speak in this hard way before, so she said,

"You just come straight to the point, and tell me your trouble—tell your own Tib."

"I know I talk all sorts of rubbish to you, Tibbins, half of it to frighten you, you dear little, *good* little, black little, sweet little, pet little thing—there, I'll tell you to-morrow."

"You will not see me for months, maybe. I am not my own mistress now, and I can't bear to leave you like this."

Nelly throws her arms round the little black doll, and hugs and kisses her. This kissing is a dead secret in the household, and no one even suspects that such a thing takes place; but the young girl's warm heart

will not be checked, and poor Tib—well, she always loved a mystery. This sweet mystery of the young, warm love was as an anchor to the lonely one, and gave her a hold on life. They held each other close, then the little woman felt her hand grasped tighter, as Nelly whispered excitedly in her ear,

“Papa is going to marry again, and I am miserable.”

“Poor lamb, poor darling; this is your trouble. Keep looking to Him. He has been my Father ever since I was ten years old, and, oh! the care and kindness. Go to Him, poor motherless lamb; He will help you.”

“Good-bye, Tibbins; I will try to be good, and I will, perhaps, go to Him, too, if only to meet you there.”

And the cab drove off with Tib; and she had not seen Mr. Harcourt, he was otherwise engaged. She thought of her pet, who often puzzled her. “Always making herself worse than she is; I do believe the darling goes to Him often, but she will not confess it.”

Leaving the cab at a bend of the road, Tib went softly, according to her directions, up to the little window of Mrs. Hodge’s cottage. Everything was as still and peaceful as if it were midnight; daily toil needs no opiate. Alice was dressed, and waiting her arrival, the black dress contrasting with the paleness of her face, and being more in unison with her thoughts, which were far from pleasant.

“Why, miss, is it you?” said Tib, with well-feigned surprise; “but I’ll say nothing now,” she continued. “Step out, miss.”

Alice moved with difficulty, and her face looked

wan and terrified. Instantly the little short arms were stretched out, and in a whisper the little black dot said—

“Let me take you. Don’t be afraid, I’m all bone and sinew.”

And cleverly and quickly she found herself lifted down from the window ledge.

“Lean on me; it is only a step.”

And with care and tenderness Tib placed her in the cab, then before taking her own seat, she shook the man roughly, as if to waken him, and said—

“To the railway station.”

Alice had a pleasurable sense of being cared for. This little woman acted promptly, as if she knew what was required of her, waiting for no commands.

“I do not want my leaving to be spoken of,” said Alice, faintly, taking out her purse.

“Never pay anyone to keep a secret, Miss Alice, for some one else may pay for the telling. You may have no fears of this man’s knowing anything of you; he never does know anything of anybody; he is seldom sober, never comes off his box after dark, drives by instinct, or else, as I often think, the horse hears and knows more than he gives a sign.”

When the cab stopped at the station Tib’s idea seemed pretty correct, for she had to touch the man’s arm again, not very gently, to draw his attention to her. He took his fare mechanically, and then his horse shambled away. After travelling a couple of hours, our friends changed the direct route for a cross-country line, and somewhere about midnight reached their destination. The moon was still up, and lent its own

peculiar charm to things inanimate. It danced with sparkling lightness on the broad bosom of the sea, for the little hamlet they had come to was a sea-side one, and the row of snow-white cottages seemed fast asleep, not even a wakeful cur to give a welcome, the breath of busy life was still. This look of peace and calm soothed Alice; she hoped a higher peace would come into her heart, and settle upon her daily life, until—when?

To a cottage standing by itself, a little more pretentious than its neighbours, our two unprotected females turned their steps; and Tib, who was always prepared for everything, taking a key from her pocket, admitted them, and woke up the interior of this sleeping-house. Very dismal it was when a light was struck; phantoms seemed meeting you from the distant corners. Going into an empty house is at all times depressing to some, the stillness seems suggestive of sorrow and watchings by the bed of pain, voices seem to echo in the empty rooms, and footsteps linger in the passages, as if the place were haunted by the memories of the past. Tib's voice sounded loud and unnatural; no ticking of a clock, no purring, even, of a drowsy cat, no home sound. It seemed to Alice as if some body or thing was lying dead near her, and no sooner was she seated on a chair than she burst into a violent fit of tears.

"Dear heart, what is it?" inquired Tib, soothing her as she would a tired child, and Alice, reaching out for the sympathy, even, of the human touch, leaned her poor troubled, aching head on the supporting arm,

and sobbed convulsively, for she felt that tears were a necessity to her.

Tib let her have her way for some time, knowing it was best, but she felt alarmed at the abandon of her grief, the causes of which were not all plain to her.

"I must get you to bed this very minute," whispered the little disciplinarian; and petted and coaxed, Alice found herself taken possession of by her attendant, who sat by her smoothing and patting the pretty hand, the ring on the third finger of the left hand not escaping her notice. Unwittingly Tib soothed and calmed the strained, wrenched nerves of her who seemed to have passed through the valley of the shadow of death in very deed. At last she was asleep, and her released attendant, leaning over, pressed a light kiss upon her brow, and left her.

But the next day, when the other cottages wakened up and opened their eyes, Tib's little cottage lay sealed and still, and it was drawing towards evening time on the third day after their arrival, when the curtains were drawn aside, and the window raised a little, to allow the tonic of a fresh sea-breeze to blow on the fevered brow of Alice Harvey. She had been utterly prostrated; so much so, as to alarm Tib, but Alice knew what she had come through, and she also knew that if she were less happy and hopeful, death, which was cheated, so to speak, at the Clewbend, would still have had his victim. She turned her head feebly, and rested her eyes on the life-bearing waters.

"Shall I get up to-morrow?" she asked presently.

"Yes, dear, I hope so; if you are very good this evening."

"Tell me how to be very good, I want so to get up to-morrow."

"Strive to lie like a fool, without a thought in your head," said Tib, solemnly, answering the first part of the question, and knowing that the brain was busy at work.

Alice smiled at the homely prescription. But our wishes very often help our actions, and Alice was feeling almost her old self the next day. She was pleased, on entering the little sitting-room of her home, to find everything looking bright and pleasant. 'Tis true, the room was bare of luxuries, but it had all necessary comforts, and that picnicky look which is often almost the only attraction of the sea-side. Tib, black and bright—if one can understand such a paradox—moving about, now to place a chair for the invalid in the very best position as regarded in and out-door belongings. As Alice entered, she could not help thinking of Tib as the good angel of the place, but, looking at her, the absurdity of the comparison made her break into a happy-sounding laugh.

"I am so glad to hear you laugh," said Tib, with a smile broadening over her swart features; "I always think it is a sign of innocence and goodness to laugh in the morning. It sounds sweeter to me than at any other hour of the day."

"Like fruit, Tib, you think it wholesomer then."

"I just do, Miss Alice."

"I must tell you what made me laugh."

And when she heard it, her own laugh was as wholesome a one as you could hear.

"Oh, Miss Alice, angels should be 'ever bright and fair.'"

"That is only our idea, Tib; and really your eyes would make an angel of anybody. I wish I had them."

"Hush, now, dear; be content, as you have got all you want with the pair you have."

"How do you know?" blushed Alice.

Tib made no other answer than stroking the little white hand, and resting significantly on the ringed finger.

"And now, Tib, you must tell me how you got the key of that cupboard, and whose this house is, and all about it."

"The cottage is mine, Miss Alice, and yours as long as you care to keep it or want it. Last winter I came here with an old lady, and nursed her for months. She died in the spring, and left me this house as it is. I never meant to keep it from her people, but no one ever came forward to claim it, though I advertised it. She was a poor, crooked body, who often said no one in the world would be sorry at her death. Anyway, the house is mine, Miss Alice, and I'm glad now that I did not sell it to young Mr. Simmons."

"How nice! I shall be your tenant, but only for a *wee* while, Tib. Do you know, I think I could be very happy here."

Then the table was drawn up to the open window, and Alice sat down to write that summons which she promised her cousin Mary should be sent off at once and bring Godfrey home, and Tib was entrusted with it to post; and such charges were given, that involun-

tarily her eye rested on the superscription. Gladness flew over her face, as the sun flashes on the side of a dark mountain.

"Oh, Miss Alice, I'm only human; I must know if it's *him*?"

"Yes, Tib," said Alice, colouring like a painted lily.

"Oh, but I *am* glad!" and a little shower of tears welled up in her eyes, dimming their fire.

"There was a sweet Mrs. Bennimore before now, and you'll make a second. I nursed her that's gone, if anybody could be said to do it, with that good son by her pillow, night and day. I'm the very one to take care of you, and I will, for *him*."

Alice was deeply touched by the faithfulness of her guardian, and unwilling to keep anything from her knowledge, she said—

"Shall I tell you why I wear mourning, and why I am hiding away here?"

"No, Miss Alice; some time else, maybe, but not now. It cannot be a pleasant reason; it will be only a bit of a mystery to me, which I dearly love. Will this bring him?" she asked, holding up the letter before she closed the door.

"Oh, yes; let me see, this is the sixteenth. Well, in a week; even if he makes a little delay, in a week he will be here."

And the sweet eyes filled with smiles and tears. Who knows if the tear, as ready as the smile, was not a foreshadowing of that which was to come? One evening she said—

"I do not like calling you 'Tib.'"

"Why?" said Tib, looking surprised; "no one ever calls me anything else."

"Oh, but no one knows you as I do; and 'Tib' sounds poor and mean."

"And so I am poor and mean; but call me anything you like."

"Did no one ever call you any other name?" asked Alice.

"Oh, don't." And she started up as if she had been struck. "You don't know how you hurt me," she said, plaintively; and Alice could see the look of agony which her thoughtless question brought over the dusky skin.

"I did not mean to be cruel, indeed I did not; you will forgive me, Tib?"

"Never mind, dear, never mind; no one does mind Tib, you know."

"I don't know," said Alice, taking her hand as she would that of a friend; "I 'mind' you, and I question if I mind any one as much."

And the petting and soothing came now from the lady, who had no idea that people of Tib's class in life had any of the finer feelings; but she was quick to unlearn as well as learn.

"There, now, I'm ashamed of myself," said Tib; "and what is it, after all, but confessing that I have been called a pet name—I needn't tell it, dear; for it wouldn't have a bit of sense to your ear; it is past and gone, like other things, amongst the 'has beens.'"

"Has your history been too painful to relate it, Tib?" asked Alice. "You know sympathy halves sorrow."

"I have no history," answered the little black ball.

"I remember nothing before I was ten years old. I suppose I was stupid ; for I know women older than I am, who can tell what happened to them at five and six. At ten an incident occurred, which stands out like Giant Despair, and which I never could forget. I remember myself very well at that time, a little black dot of a child—for I was in mourning then as now—trotting along with thread-bare shoes and bleeding feet, my hand clasped tight within my father's, who, sick and wounded—for he was a soldier—was pushing on to his native place. But when we reached Hacklebury a good woman there, who took us in, insisted on our passing the night with her ; not answering to her conscience, she said, to let a fellow-creature leave her house in so weak a state as my father was then in. And he was put to bed, and I lay by his side, our hands still clasped together. I was young and tired, and slept without a dream ; and in the morning the good woman found us, that is, I was found fast asleep, my poor father had ended his march for ever, and I was parted from the dead. No one knew anything of us—not even a name—and that's how I came to be everybody's body and yet nobody's. Mrs. Knowles was good to me, as only a Christian could be. She taught me all I know, and gave me her own trade of nurse."

Yes, certainly, Alice had to admit it was indeed a bald history. Tib seemed to have drawn a blank in the great battle of life ; but in this short and lonely story there was no allusion to the pet name, nor to the lips which uttered it. Was it her father ? Alice thought not.

"Thank you," said her listener, as she finished.

"Both our fathers were soldiers; is there not something in this to draw us closer together?"

The cottagers spoke of Alice as a widow, and Tib did not set them right; her deep mourning and sad face won their pity. And so the days passed.

VI.

WE left Clarence picturing himself sitting with eleven other honest men to view the body, and help to arrive at a proper solution of the mystery which lay before them. What would he, the chief actor, not give, as he stood in the little post-office shop, for the ignorance of each gaping gossip, who ran in with each fresh story, all unmindful of its relation to that which went before. And as Miss Mannix's voluble tongue was busy, giving Mr. Clarence the true account, that gentleman felt himself uncomfortably well-informed on part of the story, and miserably ignorant of the rest.

"She was with me here yesterday, in the afternoon, sir, fresh as a rose, and as beautiful; but she was uneasy like and anxious to get home, and said to me, laughing in her own sweet way, 'Don't keep me this evening, I am in one of my greatest hurrys.' It do seem, sir, that she never reached home. Miss Mary pacified the squire by telling him she were a-lying down; and this morning such extronary exclosures have come to light."

As Miss Mannix grew eloquent, she seemed to lose her hold of the English language; but Clarence was in no criticising mood. The story went on.

"Just about the time Miss Alice would be at the footbridge, with smart walking from my place,

Mr. Alec, he heard a scream, ran up, and saved his cousin from the pool, most providential ; how she got, by accident or design, is not known. Mr. Alec as has acted most hornable all through, carried her in his own arms to Sally Hodge's cottage, and brought his sister. They do say, sir, Miss Mary acted onlike the family in not rousing the neighbourhood ; but, howsomever, she left her at the cottage all night, and, lo ! this morning, what is the news ? but that Sally, going to her room, finds the bird took wing. She thought it was home she stepped. So after breakfast Sally carries the wet clothes to the Clewbend, but home she hadn't come. Mr. Alec and Miss Mary had to tell all they knew ; and they do say, sir, the squire he took a fit."

Her listener was growing hot and queer, so with an oath at the "cock and bull" story, as he termed it, he left the shop.

Miss Mannix watched him pass the window, then going to the box, she lifted the letter which lay alone ; it took her some time to read the address, then, dropping it in, she observed to her dearest friend on earth—herself, "Well, now, he might have brought it home again, and put the news in it ; black news it will be to *him*."

As Clarence walked away, he had much to think of ; he was behind the scenes so far as the first act was concerned ; but he had not planned how he was to act in the second part. Saved ! she was saved. Last night he would have given all he had in the world to know it, and now—oh, strange inconsistency—he would give all he possessed to know her dead ! Though

he might join in the cry that she had made a second attempt at self-destruction, he knew better than to believe it; and if she was alive, who knew it? and how would the knowledge affect him?

Hacklebury was in a fever of excitement over the sudden disappearance of Miss Harvey, and for a whole week nothing else was talked or thought of. The old squire, though he did not take a fit, was half frantic, because, as he said himself, he could make "nothing of it."

Private inquiries were held every day, but nothing new came to light. Alec and his sister and Sally Hodge told all they knew. Alec's evidence was clear and never altered. Miss Norton's was quite as clear; but a keen observer would suspect she was telling as much but no more than she wished. Mr. Monteith, who was summoned by the squire as Miss Harvey's business man, saw this and was satisfied, putting no questions to Miss Norton more than was consistent with his duty; and as he and Miss Norton seemed good friends, the squire had to rest satisfied. Mrs. Hodge was not quite so clear, and her story varied considerably; for the poor woman got the impression somehow that if Miss Alice could not be found, she, and she alone, would be held responsible. A crowd of gentlemen had come to her little place, examined the open window, and the ground outside; but nothing was discovered beyond the mark of Miss Harvey's foot-print, as was supposed, on the window-ledge; a boot was brought from the Clewbend and fitted exactly into the mark. Of course the river was dragged the very first thing, and every pool explored, with no more

mysterious disclosures than the five kittens which the housemaid at the Clewbend had persisted in declaring the mother cat had eaten.

When she could not be found people began to give reasons for her disappearance; that it was voluntary no one doubted, and after the nine days Hacklebury began to subside. Just at this crisis a letter was received by the squire, written in a disguised hand, purporting to come from a friend or "well-wisher," as all anonymous letters purport. The writer could not keep back certain information which had come to his knowledge, namely, that there had been love-making between Squire Bennimore and Miss Harvey; and that the writer had good reason for believing that she had joined the squire in foreign parts. If Squire Norton doubted the information he had only to command his daughter to speak. The squire put the letter in the fire, and never spoke of it to any one, nevertheless the report was circulated, and came to be believed; but even in wrong-doing there is an etiquette to be observed, and of course she was expected to leave a note on her dressing-table, to say that she was about to throw herself on the love of one who awaited her. Gossips do not see the absurdity of their belief at times, and by-and-by, when a letter was received at the "Firs," giving up the place to Clarence, and when the news spread, it only confirmed their pre-formed idea, especially when Miss Mannix increased their information by adding that she had it from his brother's lips, who seemed greatly "cut up," that the young squire said he would never come home, and gave no reason.

What could the old squire think ? He looked every day for a communication on business matters, but he was not troubled in any way on the matter. Things seemed puzzling to more than the squire. Clarence was more puzzled than any one ; he was safe ; his name never once came up ; he did not know how it would be with him until he had seen Alec, but that young fellow was grieving like a girl for his cousin Alice. " Safe ! " and he drew a long breath of relief. He went up to London to get things fitted into their new groove, no doubt, and peace came back once more to the Clewbend.

VII.

GODFREY was enjoying himself as well as a first-rate constitution and a first-rate pair of legs admitted. He had gone up the Rhine as far as Heidelberg, turning aside at many places from the beaten track of tourists, and exploring wondrous hills and valleys. He astonished an indolent party of Americans by the happy, enjoyable air with which he did his thirty or forty miles a day, enjoying his table d'hôte dinner too heartily to criticise it. He smiled at his English friend's complaint that the pigeons were all bone, and declared he found it the very opposite, for his bones were all pigeon ! He delighted in Heidelberg, the king of all ruins ; he often visited the English garden, as it is called, which reminded him of his own true love ; it was all the realisation of a dream to him. I doubt not my readers will vote him " lunatic," when I tell them he would not even admit the fountain to be " hideous " which " adorned " the square, outside his

hotel. A favourite walk of his was along the ferny, dripping paths, which led to the "Wolfsbrunnen," where the very trout, which perhaps an hour hence he would have placed before him, is now quietly partaking of his last meal in the feeding troughs. Godfrey was a tyro in travelling, and everything about Heidelberg delighted him; and here, one evening, looking at the stately pile, with the full moon lighting up the sculptured faces of kings and electors, he came to the conclusion that here he should bring Alice on their wedding trip. How gladly he would revisit it, and see it in the new joy of her companionship. With this resolve he tears himself away from Heidelberg and the silvery Neckar, and crossing and recrossing country at will, he is now anchored at Vevey, where he has put in for repairs, and where he has earned for himself the title of the "Easy Englisher."

He was never known to have a temper, until one day the post came in without the expected letter from Alice.

He would not believe in his disappointment.

"Surely, madame, there is another."

So he had Johann, the postman, in—the letter must be in his bag—he must look; but the German of both men differed as widely as their appearance; then the Englisher fumed, and stamped, and cursed Johann's stupidity. At last madame was summoned again as interpreter and peace-maker between them; but madame could not interpret a letter into Johann's bag. No, there was no second delivery of letters from England, and there was no mistake. M'sieur could call at the post-office, of course, and make inquiries; but he—

Johann—attended to his duties ; he delivered m'sieur one letter, and he always attended to his duties. This last phrase to be repeated *ad lib.* And the "post" trotted off, scattering, unconsciously as he went, weal or woe. And madame, the fattest and kindest of landladies, went out from her lodger, though unwillingly, and Godfrey was left alone with his brother's letter in his hand. Not caring for it as he would had it come in the company of that other sweet hand, now grown so dear and precious to him.

He turned the letter round, and just as if he held a sand-glass, so within him, at the turning of the letter, he felt his heart fall, as perceptibly in feeling as the falling sand would be to his sight. Then he opened it slowly and read. It was not a long letter, still the young man sat on, and on. He was prepared for bad news, but not that, oh, God, not that which he read. He had promised to join a party that day to Chillon ; but when his friend, without ceremony, opened his door, calling out "Come along, old fellow," he found him still with the letter in his hand, and softly closing the door behind him, he retreated, hurrying the other fellows away with him.

"Hush, he has got some bad news in a letter ; we'll look him up on our return. Come, remember we must look him up ; that letter will kill him if he lets it."

"We should have brought him off against his will," suggested another of the party.

"If you had seen him, you wouldn't say so," answered Bissell ; "he never saw or heard me — he was stunned."

In the hope that nothing was "awfully" bad, they

all agreed ; for their "big friend" was a prime favourite with his juniors.

The first tinkle of his bell brought madame, who, kind soul, was waiting to enter.

"When can I leave this ?" he asked hoarsely, as she entered.

"At any time m'sieur pleases," curtseyed madame ; "but I hope m'sieur has had no bad news."

"I mean," he answered, without looking up, "when does the next train leave ?"

"I shall send Fritz to inquire. Where for, m'sieur ?"

"You need not trouble, I shall go myself when I am ready. Bring me my bill."

Very sadly she went about her task, for she could not help seeing how bowed and broken he looked since the morning. The reserved Englishman little thought how much kindly sympathy for his sorrow the little fat woman felt as she moved about him. When she came back, he was writing a letter to his brother Clarence. Clarence had not spared him, in the news he sent him ; the few words Alice whispered into his ear, gave him the key of the whole position. And he made use of his knowledge cruelly ; with one stroke of his pen he cut the ground from beneath his brother's feet, and blotted out the blue sky from above his head. He did not say she is ill or dying. Oh, cruel words to stare him in the face, "She is dead !" Love could not speed to her, and win her back ; it was too late for everything but despair and remorse ; and his brother took care that these two should accompany him. He wrote hurriedly : "Be master at the Firs, and do better by the old place than I ever could do. The news

which your letter brings will prevent me ever seeing the old home again. God help me! for all the world is blank."

Sealing his letter, and settling his affairs, he walked out of the house. The good woman looked for his return, but he never came again, though his boxes were all unpacked, his property strewn about; and a gossip brought word that the Englishman had passed out of sight, walking with wondrous speed. We shall follow him along that valley of wondrous beauty; but our traveller was blind to all but the dead body of his dear love, Alice, and deaf to all but the solemn tolling of the dead-bell in his brain. He strode on, and late in the day reached a railway station, and took his seat in the corner of a railway carriage. His body called for food, but he heeded not, any more than he heeded where he was going to. He felt, sitting in the little parlour with that letter before him, that he must do something or go mad. And now, drawing his hat over his eyes to shade his burning eye-balls, he fled, as it were, from the sight his imagination conjured up; but as day rose and fell, he knew nothing on this earth, neither time nor place could ever separate him from his sorrow. He was oblivious of all around him; he heard the word "Express," and it suited his present mood; he had alighted at no stations; he only wanted to get on. People with endless packages, as if prepared for a long journey, filled in the space, and the great engine shrieked as it bore them along its track. Any one who noticed the weary figure in the corner, his splendid frame, his broad shoulders, and sunburnt features, might not envy him his natural gifts. To

himself he was hateful; a miserably selfish, sinful creature—oh, so selfish! What else made him wring the secret of her love from Alice; and then, instead of leaving her free, he selfishly bound her by irrevocable vows; but, oh, how cruelly she had punished him! and freed herself by the only friend she could command—death. And as each individual around him composed themselves to sleep, he groaned aloud, and cursed himself.

Alice, his Alice dead! gone from his sight! Was he never more to look into her heart through the sweet portals of her sunny eyes? Was he never more to hold her and feel her heart give beat for beat with his?

“Oh, God forgive me, for killing the sweetest thing was ever made.”

For was he not her murderer? His brother, kind, clever Clarence had hinted as much; it needed no hint to show him his sin, it was, and would be, ever present with him.

Looking round on the sleeping faces, he thought, “How can they rest so peacefully in the company of a murderer—ha! ha! And this fiend, telling off its distances in shrieks, what is it but the devil dragging me to my doom? and even there I shall not find her. The pure in heart see God. Oh, she is lost to me here—and hereafter.”

Haggard and worn, he saw the rosy dawn peep up from behind the hills, but it was hateful to him, for it spoke of life without her. And the cock’s shrill notes, as they pierced the day, were daggers to his heart.

By-and-by, the sleepers awake, and prepare for breakfast at the next station. Godfrey ate nothing,

but paced the platform, asking every five minutes, when would they move on? Finally, he slunk into his corner, writhing with impatience for motion. About noon they came to the end of the beginning, and the engine left them with shrieks and sobs.

The travellers collected in groups, and touters, calling out the names of different vessels, took possession of them and their belongings. Godfrey selected one of these men, to show him the vessel advertised to sail first from the port. As he stepped into the boat, he felt the strong breeze freshening him, and giving him additional strength. He paid his fare, and managed, blind as he was with grief and exhaustion, to scramble up the ship's side; then taking one step forward, he fell prostrate on the deck.

"A bad beginning, master," sung out an honest English voice, but he heard it not. It seemed as if he had set himself the task of reaching the vessel which was to bear him from home and country; and now, his task accomplished, he was fain to let his body have its way, and take its rest.

The doctor had not yet come on board, but he was hastily summoned, and soon stood looking with admiration at the noble length of manhood as it lay. Godfrey was carried below and laid upon a bed, where for three long weeks he lay, more dead than alive. And all on board confessed, that if he did pull through, it would be owing to the ceaseless care and kindness of his doctor and nurse in one.

Francis Sayle was himself small and neat, like one of his own prescriptions, and when he saw this splendid giant, shorn of his strength, bloodless as a girl, limp

and lifeless, his heart, which was the biggest part of him, opened to the huge distress, and he vowed to be his friend and helper. Being himself a little given to the softer passion, he pronounced that there could be but one cause for this utter prostration—a woman ; the doctor had often said, “Love grips the strongest, and plays the very devil with him.”

A man coming on board a vessel about to sail for Calcutta, and fainting outright before he pays his passage money, did not suit Captain Lebeoufs's books ; particularly a young man with neither trunks nor traps. The captain invited the doctor to be present while he looked over the insensible man's papers, with the hope of finding some clue to the strange adventure. They found a packet of letters, made up and sealed, in his breast pocket, but these they did not consider themselves justified in perusing. In his pocket-book, besides that which fully satisfied the captain's pecuniary doubts, the doctor found a crumpled letter which he considered it his duty to read ; the same which Godfrey had received the morning of his departure from Vevey, and to the reading of this the young man owed his life. For it gave the clue which the doctor needed, while at the same time appealing loudly to the tender heart of the little man. The investigation was satisfactory, for the captain, though hard-headed, and practical, was not hard-hearted—if it cost him nothing to be otherwise.

Godfrey still lay in a kind of lethargy as the good ship bore him over the blue waters of that sea which only one day to come and look at with her, had been one of his happiest dreams. We little think, when

wishing, how and when those wishes come to us fulfilled. It was many days before Godfrey was fully conscious that he lived, and then he became aware, for the first time, of a gentle hand ministering to his wants; and a cheery voice encouraged him, telling him, in choicest slang, he would soon be "on the square."

It was a beautiful evening at sunset time when he first crawled on deck; everyone volunteered their help, but the doctor put them all aside gently, remarking—

"After an illness like his, it is best not to notice him."

So they occupied themselves as usual, though many of the kindly fellows wished to welcome him among them. The doctor helped him along, while he of the cheery voice moved the sofa to face the billowy clouds of the golden sunset. He looked about him once more—on that world which he had pronounced a "blank;" he looked before him, there was nothing but piled-up cloud impenetrable; he looked behind him, on the path which led to home, but not to her; ay, all the light of his life was behind him now, and weak and exhausted as he was, he felt unable to resist the tide within him, and bursting into a flood of tears, he turned from all he saw and remembered, and buried his face in his hands. But each day he grew stronger, and resolutely turned his face to the life before him. He must live it—what would he make of it? He had passed through the furnace, but he asked himself often, in his lonely musings, "Why was it heated seven times more than its wont for him?" Thousands

were wickeder than he was, and throve on it too; and he, for this sin of selfishness, was visited thus hardly. Where was the much-talked-of mercy of God? He could not tell; to break a poor fellow on the wheel of His vengeance for what? For plucking a sweet flower to keep it his.

But these were not his average thoughts, far from it. Instead of rebelling, I doubt if man, I am sure God would not, be as hard on him as he was on himself. He was a murderer, he was not fit to live. That Alice loved him he never doubted, but he pictured the squire urging her to accept Alec, while the secret he had left with her crushed her spirit and broke her heart. He had selfishly and cruelly bound her to himself, and she—oh, God! to think of it!—she broke from them all, and was free! This is the way he raved to himself of himself.

One day Doctor Sayle said to him—

“You have never asked where you are going to, Mr. Bennimore?”

“No, for I don’t care.”

“I beg you will be careful of your words,” laughed the doctor. “Don’t forget, we are somewhat in the region of ‘Harry’s’ catastrophe.”

“I need not fear another wreck,” said Godfrey. “One scarcely could have two such in a lifetime.”

“Couldn’t they?” asked the doctor. “You must have had hard lines.”

“Yes.”

It was hard for the little practitioner to make way, but he tried again.

“You are feeling all right now, eh?”

"Oh, yes, all right, thanks."

"But left to yourself, you will get bad again."

"Oh, no, I am up, and I'll keep up."

The two men looked at each other in a kind way. Godfrey knew how much he owed to the doctor's care, but there were times when he was hardly thankful to him for keeping him in life.

"I just give you six months till you are mad, *if* you go on as you are."

"What do you mean?" asked Godfrey, hastily.

"I mean this, that I will be your friend if I can. You are letting one idea get the mastery in your brain, that you are a bad lot, and no matter what becomes of you."

"Well, if I am, what then?"

"This, that we are none of us justified in treating ourselves cruelly. Sorrow is the appointed lot of man; but it is only a great mind which can discern its uses and rise above it, and I don't myself believe that God sends suffering. If a man cuts the hair by which the sword is suspended over him, he must know the consequences, but whether cut by himself or another, his duty is to heal himself of his wound."

Godfrey listened, for his friend spoke his own thoughts at times. When the doctor paused he said "Go on."

"In a little time we shall part from each other, and it will be the best memento of our intercourse if I bear with me the knowledge that I have left you healthy in mind as well as body, and the only prescription for keeping both in health is work."

Godfrey clasped the hand of his friend in both his

own. "A thousand thanks," he said; "we shall talk of this another time; I cannot bear more now."

Yes, he knew he must work, fill up every crevice of the brain with thought, and leave no unguarded spot for memory to creep in. Let his heart be turned into a store-room for sweet looks and words of his lost life. The smiles which had turned to shadows, and the kisses? Let them be piled up as withered rose-leaves, to perfume the desolate future.

A true friendship had sprung up between the doctor and his patient, and they often spent hours pacing the deck talking over the mystery of human life; and by degrees every barrier was broken down between them, and perfect confidence was established, and the pitiful story was listened to with the deepest sympathy. Godfrey described to his friend every nook and valley of his beloved home, every turn and bend of the "Clew;" the little hollow, where he would lie, book in hand, waiting for his angel's step—she was an angel then as now. He could never bear to look upon it more. There was the fatal spot where his handiwork lay, and the giant alder stretching out its arms to kiss the bosom of the rippling river.

"If I ever go to England," said the doctor, "I shall make a pilgrimage to your old home, and give Miss Norton some account of you."

"She will hardly care to hear of me, she must hate me. I remember she called me 'cruel;' but poor Clarence will treat you well for my sake, and he will be glad to hear I am living. Tell him you left me working hard."

And this was just how he left him, preparing him-

self, by close study, for an appointment, which would give him plenty to do, and perhaps banish him some hundreds of miles up country. The doctor had found a friend in Calcutta to whom he mentioned the case of his friend, and as he was a man "having authority," he left him to his care without any scruples.

"The climate will not hurt you," said the doctor, grasping his hand; "temperance need fear no climate. I mean, temperance in everything, even in study and work."

And at his appointed task we will leave him, only remarking that oftentimes the student had to arouse the strong lion within him to keep him to his task. Often, when bending over books and maps for hours, his lamp would suddenly cast its light on a peaceful English valley, and his eye would fall upon a limp and dripping form, and a wealth of russet hair, bending earthwards; and shamefully beaten, he would throw up his hands and groan in his great agony. But he generally managed to keep his phantoms down, and would not fly before them. And he worked on bravely, keeping faith with his friend and the promise he made him.

VIII.

IN Nelly's whisper to her friend, that "Papa is going to be married, and I am miserable," lay the key to the mind she was in. Up to within the last few months, she had lived for her father, doing his bidding and, so far as in her lay, anticipating his unspoken wants, and she had reigned as queen over her little domain, jointly with him. She listened spell-bound

to his preaching, which to her ear sounded as Peter's did to the Apostles of old. She was not stupid, but intensely bright and intelligent, and just as she grew out of "twice times two are four," so she, by degrees, and almost unknown to herself, grew out of this strong belief in her father. Not by any undutiful reflection, unbecoming alike in young and old, but by his own indecision of character and inconsistency of word with act. And as she found the ground give way under her feet, she was inclined to go too great a length, and believe in no one or thing. From this Tib saved her, as well as from a dangerous illness, showing her that there are few of us without a sheltered corner in our hearts where tender thoughts and kindly deeds make themselves a habitat; and the very goodness which she was beginning to doubt, found and conquered her.

Her mother had been a delicately nurtured gentlewoman, and her memory was a track of light in her daughter's life; and had her father so soon forgotten?

A good-looking, fashionable young lady, about her own age, had listened to the minister's wooing, and blushingly signified her intention of being willing if he was able. And Nellie was told of this crisis in her life in a few cold words which dried up the tears which had sprung to her eyes, and drove them as blisters to her heart. She would have given all she looked forward to of future happiness, to close her eyes on her father's faults and failings. She had rather be a stupid little mole for all her life, and have the old feeling back once more. But just as she found that her father was only a Peter in boast and brag, so she found the

beauty of her life a dream ; and she had had a rude waking. Her plan, settled with herself long ago, to live always for him, was put aside as unnecessary ; there was no need for the sweet self-sacrifice.

And when she strove to speak, and say she hoped he would be happy, sobs choked her, and her father bid her keep her temper and be a good girl.

She wanted Tib's help and counsel, but remembering where her friend went for her little bits of wisdom, she found herself drawn there too, and was comforted.

She grew calmer over the discovery that her idol was clay—of necessity, all earthly ones must. And by-and-by, she blamed herself for being selfish. Why should not her father be happy, and in his own way ? And she was very wrong—and being very wrong, she was equally contrite and penitent. She found, when left to herself, that she possessed an amount of independence of which she was before ignorant, and which resulted in a determination to seek a home for herself where she might work and be free.

She knew that her father's future wife would never become a loving companion of hers. And she sat down to think over her position, for she had little time to act, her father's marriage being fixed for the following month. Nellie wondered if she was clever enough for a governess ; of course, there must be music, and she ran her fingers over the keys of the open instrument. How stood her French and German ? She doubted her own abilities, and proceeded to hold a very strict and searching examination of herself. When that was done, she ran through her list of likely places. When her mind was fully made up, she acquainted her father

with her resolution, and he rather surprised her by answering that he expected as much, for she seemed wishing to thwart him all her life. And he left the room. But that night at family prayer he brought on the subject, and prayed at his daughter, and in the form of petition, gave his opinion of her temper and present conduct, and drew a very doleful picture of her future state.

The tears fell fast from Nellie's eyes, but they, nor yet her father's prayer, did not weaken her resolve.

"Once he is married he will see I am right!" she said. The next day she dressed as usual and went out, only replacing her hat by a bonnet, as more befitting her errand. The minister's daughter drew on her gloves, her cheeks alternately rose and lily, and her heart beating audibly all over her body. She had made up her mind to try first at Mrs. Dodson's; she had a large family, and some one had told Nellie that she was looking out for a governess.

Mrs. Dodson was a blooming widow, left very well off. She was not a native of Hacklebury, but settled there on her husband's death; partly on account of his relatives being somebodies in the locality—and folks hinted, but this the widow indignantly denied, that she was nobody. She lived in one of the detached houses with lawns down to the road, which ran along the west of the town.

"A pretty retired spot, which just suits me," was its owner's stock phrase whenever it was alluded to.

Nellie walked along, her heart beating loud as ever; and as her hand touched the bell by the side of the green door set in the outer wall, her heart ceased beat-

ing and fell within her, causing her hand to drop the handle as if it were red hot, and bringing the tears into her pretty eyes. And she then and there found out another thing of which she had been previously ignorant—that she was nervous! “I’ll take a little turn,” she sighed, “and try again.”

She walked along past other green doors and brass bell-handles; her heart, feeling itself responsible for the cowardice, had hidden away, she scarcely knew where, so still and silent was it, unless, indeed, it had rolled itself up as a ball in her throat, for she felt herself choking. At the last of the green doors she turned to try her luck once more.

The moment she reached the door and was vigorously about to lay hold of the knob, a hand was stretched out, and a pleasant voice said “Allow me.” She looked up, a hat was raised, and she was caught. Oh how provoking! no going over the same run-away process as before, as she felt to her shame she would most undoubtedly have done. The gentleman she knew by sight to be young Mr. Norton, the squire’s son, and he was equally well informed as to who Nellie was, but never having been introduced, he felt shy of speaking, and, like most shy men, was shy of silence, and seeing the colour changing on the fair cheeks of his companion, his own flushed up for company’s sake, and by the time he had screwed his courage to the point of “saying something” the bolt was shot back; Mrs. Dodson was at home, and both visitors walked in, feeling as silly as they looked.

Nellie felt as if she hated that man, for most assuredly she would have turned and fled, even after invoking her doom.

Mr. Norton passed round to another part of the house, leaving the lady to be shown into the morning-room, where she waited some time, her heart again making itself heard in the stillness.

A loud voice announced the owner's approach, and the little frightened heart of the young girl strove to escape. There is much in a voice, and this one, to Nellie's delicate and sensitive ear, was brusque, selfish, and vulgar; turning the handle with a great clatter, the lady stepped in. She was about forty, short and broad, with a pleasant homely look about her face, despite a certain pugnacity of pattern.

"Sit down," she said to Nellie, and Nellie sat down, and in a few low and trembling words explained her errand.

"Your father is going to be married, I hear."

"Yes, madam!" answered Nellie, colouring up.

"I know Miss Ainslie. I met her two or three months ago at a friend's, she was greatly taken with me, I hear."

No answer from Nellie—she merely bowed, she was far too much in earnest to talk gossip. "Oh, if the woman would but answer me!" she thought.

"Can you tell me who is that fine-looking man, with a military 'air,' who walks with the Miss Browns? He is going to be married to the eldest, I hear."

Nellie ventured to remark that she knew very little of the gossip, and was quite ignorant of who the man with the military air might be. Mrs. Dodson then proceeded to give her listener the reason why she did not herself know the distinguished-looking stranger.

"Since my poor husband's death, I have not gone into

society, I must be careful for a little"—the last three words pronounced with an emphasis which left no doubt of the lady's meaning. She went on: "But there seems to be no one about here worth knowing, except my husband's family. My friend Mrs. Brooks, a widow like myself, who lives in London, and goes to balls and operas every night, and knows the 'first people,' has kindly offered to introduce me whenever I am ready, and, indeed," rearranging her "cocky" cap, "I don't know that I care for changing my state. After all, if you can't do the thing respectably and comfortably, I'd rather be as I am."

Poor Nellie! she could not bear any more, so she stood up.

"You needn't be in such a hurry, I'm sure," said Mrs. Dodson; "it is so seldom anyone calls here who can talk, that I am quite glad of the variety. Intellectual people can't live without society, and I was always accustomed to *that*." And the emphasis was so striking on the last word that Nellie felt she must laugh, and she did, a little merry musical chuckle, for which she had to find some fitting pretext. But Mrs. Dodson made her sit down again.

"I have not answered your question yet, sit down a bit. I have had *my* boys under the care of a most superior young man; but I am not altogether pleased with their progress, and I have been advised to try a governess. It is a fact, I'm told, that boys at their age will do more for a woman than a man. Well," and she smiled benignly at Nellie, "we have got on so well, that I think I'll take you for a month on trial,

and see how you get on. I always hi—think it better to engage for a short time first. You may not suit me, nor I you, for I am ‘awfully’ particular, I can tell you.”

And Nellie was dismissed at last. She smiled all the way home, at which of three things it is hard to say: at being hired by the month, at Mrs. Dodson’s taste for intellectual society, or at the figure of a young man, fishing-rod in hand, who met her coming out of the morning-room, and pulling off his hat, asked his aunt to introduce him.

“It is only the new governess, Alec,” repeated his relative, in an explanatory aside, but, like many shy men, Alec was determined, and saying aloud, “I know it, introduce me,” what could Mrs. Dodson do but do it?

He walked out with Nellie to the redoubtable green gate, opened it for her, and stood hat in hand as if he was watching an angel pass down the street.

The very next evening Nellie came to her new home. She had hard work to keep back tears and thoughts; but she had shed so many of both in her little room at home, that when she came forth it was with eyes of feverish dryness. She had touched with loving hand her mother’s little work-table, then pressed a long, lingering kiss on the picture of that sweet face which hung in her father’s study, letting the tears once more work channels for themselves down her pale cheeks. She bid “good-bye” to every little favourite spot, and to the old serving-woman, who came long years ago with the young bride to her new home. The old woman folded her in her arms, and

wept sore, saying, through her tears, "My bird, I'll not bide long after you." Nellie had said "good-bye" to her father in the morning. He was going away for the day, and when she moved her face towards his for one kiss of love and forgiveness at the last, he shook hands with her in a hurried way, not noticing her movement. The gloomy faces of his household, for Nellie was loved by all, had not the effect of softening his mood, and he let his child go out from the old nest without a blessing, or even a wish that she might be comfortable. "If he had only said 'God bless you!'" sobbed Nellie, as she pressed her cheek against the window-pane, to watch his retreating figure.

IX.

THE new governess was introduced to her pupils at tea "Under my own eye," as Mrs. Dodson expressed it. There were four boys; the two youngest little fellows, in their black clothes, looked to Nellie like a pair of ailing blackbirds with drooping wings.

"These are no common children, Miss Harcourt, that you can see, and I am 'awfully' particular about them, I can tell you. For the last couple of months they have been with myself. Of course, I will not expect that you will be able to show much for your first month, but I frankly tell you that I like your look, and if I do not see the children going back *much* in manner—I am 'awfully' particular about *that*—I will keep you on; I cannot be bothered with change, and I cannot be bothered with children. This eldest boy—come here, Herbert"—and very unwill-

lingly, making frightful grimaces with his mouth, he approached his mother, who gave a short biography of him as he stood, putting him to rights in rather a trenchant style. "This boy will be very independent as regards money matters, but all *my* children must work, and he is inclined to be idle."

Each of the others, called up in the same manner, were passed before the new teacher. One of the black-birds stoutly rebelled, and as Nellie sympathized with him, she strove to have him excused.

"No, no, *that* will never do, Miss Harcourt; *my* children are all obedient," and the scrap was straightway conquered by the threat of "bed without tea." "I am left very comfortable," she continued, after she had asserted her authority; "my poor husband left me nothing to think of in that way, but"—and here she smiled good-humouredly—"you must keep the children to yourself—I cannot be bothered with them, and when I pay for a governess, I think it's the least she may do," and the interview wound up with the welcome summons to tea.

There was a general scamper of little feet, and a good deal of noise, and crying for particular places, but their mother was no common woman either, so boxing them into "behaviour," the meal began. Presently the lady of the house was called away, and in a second—so quickly, that Nellie was surprised into helplessness—the whole brood fluttering their wings, and getting on their legs, fell on the good things provided, and devoured them in a masterly manner. The little scraps, getting up on their chairs, made themselves big as the best. The cream-jug was turned up

at the open mouth of the boy with "prospects," four or five little fists fell into the sugar-basin, while the butter ran down their throats as if quite alive to the necessity of despatch.

Nellie had never witnessed such a scene; she felt sad at heart at the prospect which lay before her, but in this case she was too just to blame the boys alone, for their conduct; she only wondered what sort of bringing up could produce such consequences. Feeling that something would be expected from her on the occasion, she rose from her chair, and a low, musical voice was heard above the din—

"Oh, boys, I am ashamed of you! really ashamed!"

"Well done, Preachey, you've done your part," laughed the elder boys, as they scattered showers of sugar from their lips. Their keen sense of hearing warned them of their mother's approach, and she entered the room to catch sight of the last pair of legs of the last of her four boys disappear through the window.

It took some little time for Mrs. Dodson to take in the state of affairs, for she thought the presence of a stranger was a guarantee for their good conduct, and Nellie could not tell her that in her absence her children rose like young savages, and left the ruins of a feast behind them. Their mother was angry, there was no mistake about that, and ringing the bell, she ordered fresh tea, and also ordered the boys to her presence, but they were nowhere to be found. Merely remarking, "They'll not escape me," she entered into an animated account of her own wooing and wedding, and she seemed as if she would never tire of the

subject. She finished it at last by remarking to Nellie, who asked no questions during the recital, fearing to prolong the story—

“Eh dear! I don’t think I’ll ever marry again, accustomed as I have been for thirteen years to a perfect gentleman—for my husband was *that*—I couldn’t be bothered with everyone.”

Nellie, though very much amused at the revelations of the widow, was not sorry that the conference was ended by the entrance of nurse to say that the young gentlemen were all up in the ash-tree at the bottom of the lawn, “And won’t come down for no one, ma’am, though it’s long past their bed-time.”

“Tell them to come down instantly, or I’ll strap them well.”

“Please, ’m, the young gentlemen say as how they will come down, ’m, if you promise not to strap them.”

Nellie got up, saying she would go and see what could be done. How pleasant the fresh air felt, how sweet the stillness of the dying day. How she would like to stand and turn her face to the calm, clear promise, pierced here and there with silver stars, of another cloudless morrow; then, as she felt the soft springy turf beneath her feet, oh, how inclined she was to open her arms wide and scamper down the gentle slope; but remembering that she was now a staid preceptor of youth, she did none of these things, but walked soberly and thoughtfully in search of her duty. There, more like blackbirds than ever, perched the four boys—even the littlest fledgling contrived, with help, to get on his roost—and in their leafy

citadel defied invasion. She delivered their mother's message, they must come down "immediately."

All the boys spoke together, "If she promises not to strap us, we'll come down."

"She said," answered Nellie, "if you didn't come down she'd punish you."

"Thank you," laughed Herbert, "we're not so green. If we come down she'll strap us all the same. Get her promise, and we'll come."

So she retraced her steps for the required promise, but found it was not so easy to get, Mrs. Dodson explaining that she intended to punish them, and keep "master," but that they must be got down. "If one of the branches broke, what a state I'd be in."

The boys would not come without the promise, so Nellie asked Mrs. Dodson to pardon them at her request. "It is getting late and cold, and they will stay there all night if you do not promise."

"Just tell them they may thank you, then."

And Nellie ran off this time with the pardon. Even then they did not hurry down, but proceeded to hold a council of war, and Nellie understood mother and children better from the disjointed sentences which fell to her share, as she stood waiting under the spreading tree.

"Didn't she do it last time?" asked the second boy, with a tone of cool contempt; but Herbert counselled a quick descent, or they would catch it for delay.

"I say, is it all right?" he inquired of the mediator.

And unhesitatingly she looked up and answered "Yes."

So, cautiously, one after another, they dropped at her

feet, hurrying off to the house like frightened hares. Nellie went to her room sad and dispirited. She wanted to think over the task which lay before her; a hard one it would be to bring those rough, uncouth boys into habits of order and obedience. She did not shrink from the work—she had some idea of where the error lay, and she resolved honestly to do her duty by them. Her thoughts were interrupted by cries, roars, and loud voices coming to her from below. Fearing she knew not what, she hurried along. Seeing a servant crossing the hall, she asked what had happened?

“It’s only missis, ’m, strapping the young gentlemen.”

Nellie felt she had been deceived, while probably the boys would look on her with dislike and distrust. She felt indignant at being made the medium of a deception. She ceased to wonder at their conduct, now that she had had a specimen of their teaching. She sat down in one of the windows, out of the sound of strife, and here Mrs. Dodson found her in passing to the drawing-room to throw herself on the sofa after her exertions. At nine o’clock Nellie met her at supper; some cold ham, a wing of chicken, and a couple of glasses of wine, brought back her strength and spirits. Nellie asked Mrs. Dodson to give her entire control over the boys for the month. She was in the humour of being pleased at any arrangement which promised ease to herself, and she most readily gave her consent.

“I am so sorry,” said Nellie, “that they should think I intentionally deceived them to-night; I really thought you had promised. I should be more parti-

cular to keep faith with a child than with an older person."

"Lord bless you," sniffed Mrs. Dodson, "we all manage our children when we haven't them." And she threw herself on the sofa again with a dull thud and a heavy sigh.

"Should you mind my going in and apologising to them?" asked Nellie, as she said "good-night."

"You may go in, if you like, and tell them from me to stop that noise, or I'll strap them again. I *will* have obedience."

Nellie took no candle, trusting to the moon's more modest light. Knocking at the door, one of the boys in a surly tone said, "Come in."

"May I come?" said she, opening the door. "I want to tell you how sorry I am that I was mistaken in what I said to-night. I feel I am to blame for your punishment."

"You weren't mistaken at all," sobbed Herbert from the floor, where he sat, nursing a bruised limb. "She always does that, says she won't till we give in, and then we catch it; but the very next time see if one of us stirs till morning."

"I hope," said Nellie, sitting down and drawing the youngest on her lap, "that there will never be a next time. The only way to escape punishment is not to deserve it."

"Much you know about it," sobbed a little fellow, more truthful than polite; "we get punished just as often when we don't deserve it as when we do."

"Well," said Nellie, "you all know you deserved it

this time—robbery—you know you took cream, sugar, butter, and, what else ?” she asked pleasantly.

“Jam and biscuits,” laughed Bob, the second boy.

“Now, I am to be your teacher from to-morrow,” she went on, “and I want us all to be friends.”

The little fellow on her knee echoed her words in a sleepy sobby kind of way, “’Et us be fens.” Nellie kissed the little cold wet cheeks, and the boys clapped their hands and cried “Hurrah, Brick.”

“I am much older than any of you, and experience, or knowledge of right and wrong, comes with years. So you will give me credit for knowing a little more than you at present, but even little Brick here knows he was not right in helping to destroy everything on the tea-table, this evening. Did you think it right, Brick, to take the sugar ?”

“Oh, no ; ma beat me,” he murmured.

“Yes, we all know right from wrong in cases like this, but sometimes the right is not so easily seen. Now I want you all to keep faith with me, as I mean to keep it with you. I want us all to be friends, and to become so we must trust each other.”

“Oh, we all promise to be friends,” said Herbert in a dignified manner, from the floor, “but you’ll be new style, here, if you keep friends with us. We had Snooks teaching us for a year and more—he was a great friend of *hers*, but not ours.”

“I shouldn’t like you to speak of me as *her* !” said Nellie significantly.

“All right,” retorted the youth, “I won’t.”

“Promise me you will go to bed when I leave ;” then, remembering her own baby days by the knee of a loving mother, she asked,

"Do you say any prayers?"

"Sometimes, when we are good."

"It is when we are bad we need them most; but I will leave you now. Did you promise to go to bed?"

"Yes," they answered. She put the little fellow into his nurse's arms, fast asleep.

"The Lord bless your sweet face, miss," curtsied the woman.

As Nellie stood there in her simple muslin frock, a pale blue ribbon in her hair, the moon lighting up and kissing the pale beauty of her face, full of earnest purpose, she looked the picture of a good simple girl, not much less of a child than the eldest of themselves, but so wise and thoughtful. She kissed each of the boys and felt the act fully appreciated by them, the young rogues were old enough for that. And they all went quietly to bed, to the surprise of nurse, who generally had her own small battle to fight after the "Missus" had gained hers. And the two elder lads dreamed that an angel came down to them from a tree, and stood by them and dropped honey on their lips, whispering "Let us trust one another."

The next morning the new governess was well dissected by the boys, and put together again to their complete satisfaction as a "stunner." Nellie entered on her duties with no light heart. She hoped her pupils would learn to love her, then she knew she might influence them for good, and she set about her task.

Instead of nurse giving them their tea seasoned with high words and threats of awful moment, the new governess presided herself at the five o'clock tea,

her fastidious taste soon banishing the sounds of supping and eating. She explained that, however young, they were gentlemen, and the elder boys soon felt her influence and the charm of being "cared for." Nurse, with her white apron and close cap, was replaced by a pretty girl who might have been their dear eldest sister, had she lived. Long before the month was up "tea" became a pleasure. No matter what the romping might be, each boy found time to wash his hands and arrange his hair. Herbert has even gone to infinite trouble to procure a small half-opened rosebud for his button-hole. Should Nellie smile approval and admire it, the young heir would gallantly present it for her acceptance. And little Bricky would run all over the house in search of nurse to "cean" him for Miss "Ha-co." She took care that the children's table should be neat and orderly. She never neglected placing a glass of carefully picked flowers in the centre, which took their fancy immensely and always supplied a topic for conversation. Instead of lumps of bread thrown in a slovenly heap, bread and butter was cut and nicely arranged, and Herbert learned to get up and help his brothers.

Of course all this was not accomplished at once, it was slow and sometimes difficult to teach. But the boys came to see that her wishes did not vary with her caprice, that she never asked them to do an unpleasant thing if she could by any possibility avoid it, and when they saw it, her task became easier, and it was soon understood among them that whatever she said must be done; having said it with thought and firmness she never wavered. This point of obedience

she found most difficult to attain. The boys were accustomed to hear they *must* be obedient, and strong measures were resorted to, under very high pressure, to subdue them, but the idea of obedience to any law without this pressure was new to them.

One day they all went nutting in the Clew woods, and Nellie said to them, as they walked along,

"Boys, how would you like a half-holiday every Monday?"

"Oh, Miss Harcourt, how jolly!" was the delighted response.

"But wait awhile; I'm going to have terms."

"What do you mean?" And an indistinct idea of payment floated through their wise heads.

"The 'terms' are simple," she said. "I have got a little book here, and all of you who are willing to accept the terms will sign your names. I want to teach you a lesson, the most difficult you have ever learned; it is a beautiful lesson, though you may not think so now. Each added year of your lives you will see its value, and when you are men, it may perhaps one day make you famous. It is a short lesson of two words; and if you do not learn it now, you may never be able in after life."

Nellie wished to excite their interest and curiosity, and she succeeded.

"What can it be? Is it English?" and so on.

"I'll len it," said little Bricky, looking up at her, with a smile of fidelity, as he trotted by her side.

"What makes you say that?" asked Bob, "when you don't know what it is."

"'Cause it's shawt. I like shawt lessons," and they all laughed, Bricky included.

"Well," said Nellie, "the lesson is 'implicit obedience.' I cannot get on without it; and I have thought of bribing you with a half-holiday, in hopes of your undertaking to learn it. I have no doubt if you once knew its beauty and place in our lives, you would need no bribe, for it is its own reward."

"Implicit obedience! why that's very easy. It is, is it not, to do as we are bid?" asked Herbert thoughtfully.

"Yes; and I am glad you think it easy. Will you sign your name?—see, here are the days, and the space left between for the marks."

They all sat down, and the signing of their names was great fun; it seemed like belonging to a secret society.

"What will Bricky do, he can't write?" inquired Lionel, who was proud of his own round hand.

Nellie looked at the little loving face, always turned to hers, as if his little starved heart hung on her. "We'll take his word; he is a little brick."

"I's a 'ittle Bick," he echoed as usual.

"What is the meaning of 'implicit?'" asked Bob, who seemed possessed of the bump of caution.

"Walker gives the meaning of the word in this connection as 'entirely obedient;' but the meaning I prefer is 'unquestioning.' Remember," she said, laughing, "I may tell you to put your hand in the fire, and you have promised to obey me!"

"When you tell us we may do it," said Herbert, who was beginning to see Nellie's drift.

Turning to him she said, "I think you are in a fair way to earn the holiday, for confidence in each other has much to do with obedience."

This holiday was very fluctuating for a time; but before long it was of weekly occurrence.

"I say," said Herbert, one day, to the others, "don't you see, it's double as jolly for us. We are never getting into scrapes so long as we do as we are bid."

"Is it only now you have found that out?" asked Nellie, with a laugh, coming in unseen.

One day she asked the boys if they would like to ask their mother to tea, and they all readily echoed Herbert's "yes;" and Mrs. Dodson accepted, though it rather surprised her to be invited. Nellie coaxed a hot cake from cook, and little Bricky went about telling every one of the cake first, and then the "company;" and cousin Alec heard it, and took the young reporter on his knee, and asked him how he liked Miss Harcourt; but Bricky was not advanced enough for this form of question, so he asked him if she was good to him. And the little scrap said she gave him "sudder."

"And what else?" asked inquisitive Alec.

"Tisses," said the youngest Dodson, clapping his little palms together.

"What would she give me if I went to tea?" asked the young man.

"Sudder."

"And what else?"

"Tisses."

And Alec coloured up and then laughed.

Mrs. Dodson came to tea, and was greatly surprised to find her own children taking their places at the table with well-bred quietness. They had grown out of "being boxed into place." She was actually

obliged to treat them with politeness, as she would older folk ; and to Herbert's " Let me give you a little more cake, mamma," she answered, " No, dear ; it is very nice, but I have had a great piece."

For the first time in her life she spent a pleasant evening with her own family, and ended it without a " strapping." She expressed herself pleased with them, and, in a condescending way, said she did not think they had gone back in manner. " But, you know, Miss Harcourt, you happened to get charge of them under most favourable circumstances, fresh from a mother's care."

Herbert and Bob were fine manly boys of ten and nine, and at once stepped from their thralldom into their proper place, as befitting their age and boyish ambition. The eldest confided his young hopes to his brother, that he would one day marry Nellie, as he was deeply in love with that young lady. And Bob swore—to himself—that when that day came, there would be a tragedy enacted in the family, as he, too, was deeply in love with Nellie. But he manfully kept his own and his brother's secret.

Many a time, during her long months of toil, Nellie missed Tib ; and when she wearied of seeing any fruit to the labour she had set herself, then her friend's quaint words of hope were needed ; and though she wrote to her, Tib's pen was not a bit like Tib's tongue. As is often the case, she could talk beautifully, but not on paper. What with twisting her y's, and shaping her p's, it took her a longer time to write six lines than to converse for half an hour. " It's a very

different thing, Miss Nellie; one hasn't to spell their words in talking."

Nellie laughed at Tib's letters, and Tib knew she did. "Oh, the dearest old Tibbins," said she, after devouring one of the little fat missives. "She has more black beetles than ever running about the sheet." The black beetles brought volumes back to Tib from the ready pen of her friend. And in one of these she says she has seen young Mr. Norton two or three times, but none of the family besides, as they are still in great grief for the unaccountable disappearance of Miss Harvey. And Nelly asks Tib if she thinks that she went away to young Squire Bennimore, as everyone there seems to think—everyone but Mr. Alec; he will not allow any one to say it in his presence, "so the boys tell me." And these words cheered another heart than Tib's, and brought a smile where smiles were growing rare; for we all of us like to be thought well of by those we love.

X.

POOR Alice felt her heart grow sick with fear as the days passed away, without bringing either lover or letter. Each day as Tib returned empty-handed, she would cry he is coming, he will be here to-morrow. But each to-morrow died without him, and the watching eyes grew large and hungry. All her letters came under cover to Tib, and some days after these watchings began, Tib rushed home with one of these missives in her hand.

"Poor lamb," said Tib, placing it in the white, trembling hand; "God grant it may comfort you."

And by-and-by Tib came back to see Alice's own letter, which she had posted a week before, lying by her side, "From the Dead Letter Office," and gathering up the crushed heap, which lay as if dead, she laid her by the open window, bathing her pale face, and watching the slow recovery. Was it a recovery, after all? The opening of the sad eyes, the parting of the pale lips, the twitching of the nervous hands, and then the silent, hopeless flood of tears, and so she lay for days, to Tib's sorrow and dismay; she could not rouse her, she never spoke, but seemed alike crushed in mind and body, not caring to live, and washing away her life in tears. But we cannot die when we would, and it is well. One evening the little hand sought Tib's, who kept her faithful watch night and day, and the poor wan lips trembled to the sound of speech.

"I have been so selfish, Tib, and you have been so good."

"Me good!" and our little friend spoke much in the same tone as she might say, "Are you mad?"—"You know nothing of the hardness of my heart, and how full it is of rebellious thoughts of Him who doeth all things well, though it may not be in our way. And—oh, dear! but His hand is heavy on some."

"Ah, Tib, we often think it is God's hand when it is our own. Tib," she went on, "you must leave me here for a couple of days, and go to my cousin Mary. I cannot live in this uncertainty; I am sorry I ever came here, but as it is so, you must be my dove, and go and come with news of him. She will tell you what I cannot. Tell her that written on the outside of the returned letters I read, 'Mr. Bennimore left on

the sixteenth, leaving no address ;' and oh, Tib, tell her that I am dying, and she must come to me."

And Tib prepared for her little cross-country journey, but did not leave until she had installed one of the cottagers in her place, who brought a baby with her, leaving a matronly little woman of ten to look after "feyther" and the children. Tib confided her young mistress to Mrs. Blair's sympathy, telling her that she had come back from the gates of death.

"Eh, dear, but she's young," remarked Mrs. Blair, "young and sweet as an angel, and too like one," with a wise shake of the head. "I wouldn't wonder, now, if summit is wrong with her stomach, judging from them black circles under her eyes—grief acts on the stomach—I have an uncommon weak one myself, and if I have I'll tell you how I treat it. I ses to it, 'Do your wust,' and it do, and I'm the better for it. Believe me, it takes the stomach to do its wust at times to make it better." Tib smiled. "Now I'm a bit of a cook," continued the new broom, "and I'll just make half-a-dozen paste dumplins while baby sleeps, and if one o' them don't bring her stomach to its wust, never trust me again."

Tib gave full permission for the dumpling-making, a kind of pill which she knew was popular in the neighbourhood, but to Mrs. Blair's astonishment she was charged to present none of them to her young mistress.

"Eh, now, see that, and my man wouldn't have dinner without."

Tib was welcomed by her old friends, and many inquiries were made concerning the widow with whom

she was living, and kind wishes expressed that she would come among them once more.

"Ah," said the squire, "things are altered since you were here, Tib," and he told her the story of his niece's desertion. "I'd rather believe her dead than think she'd deceive me, but I'm forced to believe it," he repeated, in a melancholy kind of way. "If she thought for a moment, Tib, that I would press my son's claim against her wishes, she was very foolish; it was my love for her that would have given her the best I had, that was all."

It was very hard for Mary to hear her father speak so, and know that he grieved for her daily, and yet not be able to relieve his mind, but how to do this without explanations, which would be both painful and unsafe, she knew not. Unwise and ill-judged as the whole proceeding was, she knew her father too well not to know that she should have his entire forgiveness whenever she brought with her the peace-offering he missed so much. When alone with Tib she asked eagerly—

"How is she? how is she bearing up?"

"Up to this, Miss Mary, it was well and ill with her, but the last news made it ill indeed. She thinks herself she is dying, but as long as she hears no worse of the young squire, she will live."

"I have been collecting evidence, Tib, which I think will satisfy her that a great deception has been practised upon him. I want but one link in it, and that, I think, Miss Mannix can supply, if she tells me the date of Clarence Bennimore's last letter to his brother. Alice, owing to her illness, was prevented for some

days writing to him, and I, stupid and thoughtless, might have known he, who would gain most, was not idle."

"Miss Mary, would it be any advantage to Mr. Clarence if the squire never came home?"

"Yes; he would get a fortune without working for it, and, what would be dearer to him, have his revenge on Alice; and to secure all this, I suspect him of having written to Godfrey of Alice's death, when he thought, perhaps, she was dead. Do you understand?"

"I see it all! I see it all!"

That very evening Mary got all the information she wanted from the postmistress.

"Yes, indeed, I can tell you the date easy enough. I have good reason not to forget it, for he waited here with the letter in his hand, to hear all the news of dear Miss Alice; and I stamped his letter, wondering, as I did it, that he would write so far away without telling him the latest news, but of course it was not my place to speak."

"A thousand thanks, Miss Mannix. And one more question, please: how soon after that letter was posted did the squire's arrive, giving up the place?"

"By return of post; it was the only letter ever came."

XI.

MISS NORTON walked home fully impressed with the belief that Clarence had been playing at a dangerous game. Had his murderous attempt succeeded, what a clue was here given under his own hand of his own guilt. He had probably judged his brother well

enough to know that home would not be home without *her*. Mary had to contrive some way of seeing her cousin, and telling her all she had learned. Nothing could be more natural than Miss Norton's taking advantage of Tib's visit to the Clewbend to pay a visit to Leconfield, arranging for Alec to meet her there the second day, and escort her home; for though Clewbend had a mistress, she did not count for much. She was a delicate little woman, who had been always remarkable for silence, and of late years had become very deaf. She was usually to be found with a huge volume before her, the larger the better, bearing, in some measure, on "Moral Philosophy," but it would not give you much idea of her mental absorption, to watch the length of time which would occasionally elapse before the turning over of a fresh leaf. The fact was, she slept over her book, but the simple soul thought it was her own secret, for after dinner she had acquired the habit of taking her more than forty winks in an upright position, and if her head ever did advance beyond the perpendicular, she turned over a new leaf with a flourish of trumpets, and disarmed suspicion, but as her head bobbed forward every five minutes on an average, she turned her leaves pretty rapidly as the evening advanced. She liked taking notes as she read, and often the pencil and long narrow strip of paper were in constant requisition. The only scrap which is at my command has the week's consumption of bread dotted down in small literary text, and the price in equally gifted figures. She was looked on as a little weak by her acquaintances; she

was decidedly "weak" in chin, and it was well that neither of her children inherited her "want."

She knew very little of what went on around her, as well as taking a long time to get a new idea into her head; she seemed to require the setting in motion of so much machinery before she got hold of it, that it was thought better for her not to have too many efforts to make. What went before never helped her to that which was to follow; her brain seemed to be supplied schoolboy-fashion, with a damp sponge, which obliterated everything. She never got her head cleared of the hopeless muddle which Alice Harvey's disappearance had caused. She asked many questions, for that was the form her conversation took; but few of them could be answered at the time, and her infirmity prevented her from hearing the answers, as time and circumstances unfolded them. That her niece had disappeared she knew; but it was not her way to let anything trouble her long. She prided herself on possessing a strong and well-balanced mind, and trifles were completely blotted out from it. Now Tib's coming revived the household sorrow; but Mrs. Norton never alluded to it, indeed it is a question if she would recollect Alice, unless the machinery was set working. Mary set off on her shopping expedition, but before reaching Leconfield, she turned aside at the little cross station. Alec was true to his appointment, meeting her the next day, full of news, which he had picked up in the busy street.

"Why, Mary," he said, "guess who is going to stand for Leconfield?"

She did not know what prompted her to guess Clarence Bennimore, but she guessed him, and rightly.

"You are a little witch," said her brother. "How did you think of anything so unlikely?"

"Not at all unlikely that he is ambitious."

"They say here that he will be tricked," went on Alec. "The Tories want to keep the seat for Colonel Fraser, and the conceit of Clarence will occupy it till he comes."

"Is he likely to be tricked? Far more likely he will trick them."

"Oh, no; they'll manage it," answered Alec, in high glee. "He will canvass, but the voters are up to the dodge, and will sell Clarence when the time comes."

"We'll see," was Mary's cautious rejoinder; but she encouraged Alec to talk and avoid questions which might be awkward to answer.

When they reached home the news was before them. Tib had paid a visit to the Firs, and heard it from the housekeeper.

"Dear knows," said that functionary, "it's but a poor place since the squire left. Ah, well, young people won't be led; but sure enough old master he did say that Mr. Godfrey would rue going to furrin parts. 'No good will come of it,' he say, and no good have come of it; and this fine place moulding away. I opes the windows in the sunshine, and shuts them in the shade; but there's silence where there should be sound, and it's all an upsetting of the ways of Providence, I say. The young squire should come to his own."

"If I knew where he was," said Tib, "I'd soon bring him home."

"There's no one knows where he went, Mr. Clarence told me himself; but he did say Miss Mary at the Clewbend ought to know, for her cousin have went to the same place."

"It suits Mr. Clarence to talk like that; but I want to know what was there to prevent the squire marrying Miss Alice, and coming home to do it too?" said Tib.

"Them very words I said to Mr. Clarence, who, says I, would think they were not good enough for one another. If ever a man were made for a woman, says I, it is Mr. Godfrey for Miss Alice. The squire at the Clew, says he, would rayther see her dead than married to any one forbye his own son."

"Well, Mrs. Anderson, I'm not rich, but I'll give five golden guineas for the young squire's address, for," said Tib, lowering her voice to the strictly confidential, "some one has made a fool of him."

"Lord bless you," said the housekeeper, in the same tone, "it's Miss Harvey as have done it all; Mr. Clarence said as much. She was in love with him, it seems, and he is that kind and good as wouldn't hurt a fly; and he went away intending to break with her, for no gentleman likes to be made love to; but she followed him, you know, and it would be hard for him to bring her back in the face of the country."

Tib could listen to no more, so, rising, she took her leave.

"Good-evening, ma'am; we'll see Mr. Godfrey yet, please God."

Clarence was in London ; he had taken rooms in the Albany, and spent his days between Mr. Finch and some questionable friends picked up in questionable quarters. He passed for a man of means, with nothing to do ; and his political friends advised him to enter parliament. Leconfield was vacant, and Colonel Fraser, who was spoken of as the choice of the borough, was not expected home for some little time. It was suggested to Mr. Finch that some fledgling might be puffed up to keep a rival out. Mr. Finch mentioned his friend—good family—fortune—and “blind with conceit.”

“Start him,” wrote the colonel ; “at the end the usual thing, ‘great ability,’ ‘better opening,’ ‘larger field,’ *ad. in.*, as you see fit.”

And Clarence smiled when he heard the proposal, stroked his moustache, bit his nails, and wrote a draft of his address, which he left with his friend, and for the remainder of the day his brain was swimming and his heart beating to the tune of his own success, his own cleverness, his own tact. And he lay down at night praying to himself, worshipping himself, and acknowledging with thankfulness that he had always seen what was in himself. What if he had knocked a few hindrances out of his path ? One cannot go through a forest without clearing the way. Any means are lawful to reach a great end. And he actually grew hot over the escape he had from turning out a fool ! A while ago he was nearly determined to leave all, seek his brother, and bring him home rejoicing ; but, thank God, that was merely the effect of idleness. Now that he had something to do, a set purpose to attain—a step

far up on the ladder of fame—he would not show such feebleness; for if ever there was a fool, in his eyes, it was the man who, having done evil, repented of it. Granted that it was a bad action, you make it worse, he reasoned, by repentance; a coward may repent—a great man never. He attended a Bond Street professor, who found it a pleasure to impart his science of elocution to so promising a pupil. After his last lesson was taken, he sauntered up Piccadilly, and into the “Row,” sitting down on a chair, he tapped his shiny boots with a fancy cane, while a gay butterfly beauty whirled and whirled round his path; her wings were painted in beautiful tints, and once more she spread them, jealous that a pair of male eyes should remain oblivious of her charms, but all in vain, as she would have known, had she seen the workings of the man’s heart before her. He was in thought, making his maiden speech. His teacher had praised him highly, telling him he was sure to make a “hit;” and now, in imagination, the first tones of his voice have been heard on the floor of the House. Old men, with jealous though admiring eyes, are taking notes of his “style;” and reporters lean over to catch his words, low now, as becoming his position, but one day to be heard and flashed to waiting thousands. Carried away by the subject of his thoughts, and having just delivered a cutting and caustic reproof to “my right honourable friend opposite,” he proceeded to sit down, and as the very best way to do this had been a study also, he placed his hands to gracefully raise his coat-tails; but how can I describe the absurd figure he presented, when, instead of the graceful lifting of his flaps,

he hit his hands against the common-place green chair—iron too. The well-bred “giggling,” for there is such a thing, brought him back to life and eyesight, and showed him that, instead of the floor of the House, he occupied the unenviable position of being stared at by a bevy of glancing, merry eyes, set mischievously in female faces; while the sterner, and not-to-be-trifled-with, male eye, said as plainly as possible “Take care.” So our orator got up, and walked in among the horses, and listened for awhile to the Guards’ band. But he soon left the gay throng, as ill suiting his selfish spirit, and betook himself to Finch’s cheerless room. There, deep in papers and documents, he strove to cast up his accounts, and see how he stood as regarded “balance in hand.”

Now Mr. Finch had hinted that a couple of thousands would pull him through the election, and like an experienced general, he let fall a hint which set the poor fluttering candidate’s heart wild with delight; and he meditated over the great effect his address must have had on the chiefs, as he listened to the Finch’s sweet notes.

“They think in high quarters, my boy, that you could fill a bigger thing than Leconfield, so be prepared, if an old bird drops, to take the vacant perch.”

Of course he knew well to what he alluded, for everybody knew that the Honble. Charles’s death, which was daily looked for, would leave the county unrepresented.

The Earl of Hacklebury’s brother was an old man, and the earl had been a friend of his father’s, and

might help the son. What fortune awaited him, who could tell ?

"How can I thank you?" murmured Clarence.

"You may thank yourself for your own success ; did I not tell you that was the word, and not 'chance'?"

The words he alluded to did not strike the young man then, and, after some further business, he went to his own rooms, shut in from the roar of Piccadilly, and yet hearing the swell, like the sobbings of the great sea, he read and wrote far into the night ; and, last of all, he thought, as usual taking the grandest of subjects—himself ; and in the midst of his rhapsodies the echo of the words he had heard that day came back to him, touching some far-away corner of his heart—or brain ; and he repeated, while a black scowl came down on him as the night of bitter darkness outside. "Has it been success ? ay, has it indeed been ?"

Tib went back to her charge, and found her young mistress brighter than she had ever hoped to see her.

"Cousin Mary is a wonderful doctor, Tib ; she administered life and hope with her kisses. Her prescription is, 'wait in hope, never doubting ;' and I have promised to grow strong ; and now, Tib, tell me if you have seen your dear Miss Nellie, and is she well?"

And Tib's face shone with pleasure at the sound of her pet's name, and her great lamps shone clear as stars.

"I saw the dear child, and she is well and happy, because she is busy."

"Tib."

And there was a deep earnestness in the tone which was not usual.

"Tib, I must do something as Nellie does, and, like her, be happy."

"I always thought, Miss Alice, that the happy can afford to be idle; but to the sorrowing it is double grief."

"I feel it so, Tib; even while I held Mrs. Blair's baby I found it did me good. I thought of it, not of myself."

"Work was always a strong point with me, Miss Alice."

"I don't know what to do," was the response, with a sigh. "I suppose I ought to get my books, and go on with my studies."

"Work, to be really a blessing," said Tib, dogmatically, "must be for others; the hand stretched out with a cup of cold water comes back with the 'Master's' blessing."

"You speak like a book, Tib; tell me what to do."

"We must wait for the wave, Miss Alice; but what your hand finds to do cannot be far away."

And so the conversation ended.

XII.

WHEN Alice asked Tib what she could do, Tib could have told her; but that round ball of wisdom knew that half the pleasure of the proposed occupation lay, at present, in thinking of it. So she suggested nothing, knowing that Alice's mind was too healthy to spend itself on her own sorrow, however keen. And she was

right, for in a few days she had found her work ready to her hand.

The little village was inhabited by a hard-working, rural population, most of the men being employed on neighbouring farms, while a fair number earned their living by the more arduous and precarious employment of the fishing-boats. The fish found a ready sale in the neighbouring towns, and satisfied the men for their nights of toil ; but an enterprising comrade had started a cure of fish, and with it the extracting of the oil, and it was fast becoming a lucrative business. The women found employment, and earned a something, as well as their agricultural neighbours, who, in the season, shut up their cottages, wives and babies seeking the hay-fields, or the golden sheaves of dropping corn. But a calamity, frequent enough in the crowded city to be passed over lightly, shook this little hamlet to its centre. It happened in the family of Mrs. Blair, whose acquaintance we have made. She had shut up her house, leaving her youngest baby at home in charge of a child a good deal bigger, but not much wiser. The baby had been ailing, and not wishing to expose it in the hot hay-field, the mother left it in charge of her second eldest girl ; and in shutting up the house, and giving ominous directions about fire, she thought all would be well. Tired and weary, at the sunset, the poor woman sought her home to find the baby a charred and blackened heap. Her cries soon brought the whole village to her door, where, till late into the night, gossips lingered, explaining to the more obtuse how the accident happened. The little nurse seemed stupified with grief, and showed the one-pained win-

dow she had broken in striving to get through ; but at mid-day, in haymaking, the fields are populous, and roads deserted, and no one heard, and no one helped. Probably it was too late for help when the little maiden discovered her baby brother fallen across the hearth. She had been fully occupied in a corner of the outer room, with a doll's tea-party ; her brother's cry came to her just as the little maid opened the book of Common Prayer, which served as a door to the dolls' mansion, to announce Mr. Jepp, and hurriedly apologising to her guest, and leaving him in company of Miss Dolly, the little girl ran crying, "What is it, Johnnie?" But the empty cradle made her look round ; she managed to put out the fire, and her hands and arms bore painful testimony to the truth of her statements, but it was too late—the fluttering heart and pulse had grown still for ever. After crying "enough !" Mrs. Blair, with commendable forethought, set her board to prepare dumplings for those friends who, taking advantage of the next day being Sunday, would show their respect to her and her "man" by coming to their child's funeral.

The minister was expected to address the mourners before proceeding to the grave-yard ; and Tib, with the other women, expected a "blessed time of it." Alice felt the baby's death, and such a death ! Only a few days ago she had nursed it, watching with interest its peaceful smile and the questioning gaze of its clear, blue eyes. Tib had asked her to come and hear Mr. Hare, and Alice felt she ought ; she had no right to shut herself in apart from others' sorrow, besides she wished to

show her sympathy with the sorrowing parents, and she resolved to go.

She watched the people trooping over the hills as the hour drew near, clean, grave, and orderly. Alice, in her deep mourning dress, entered the cottage, and took her place near the tiny coffin, looking so unlike anything they had ever seen before in such close contact with them that the people seemed awed by her presence, and lowered their words to whispers.

The poor mother, rocking herself to and fro, was not unmindful of the honour done her by the lady of the village appearing in her house. What would the Joneses and Smiths think of that? And above all, how glad she was that Elizabeth Wells was there to see and carry the news home, for she was one of those who thought John Blair might have done better than marry as he did, and the "doing better" would have been to marry herself. So she could not help her eyes finding out Miss Wells, as Alice, pale and beautiful, unlike anything they had ever touched or seen, impelled by that kindness and sympathy which, in sorrow, makes the whole world kin, came forward and took the hard hand of toil, and clasped it in her own, and a few sweet words from one who also had a cross to bear, fell like balm on poor Mrs. Blair's heart. She curtsied low, and her tears fell faster.

The minister came and the service began; it was simple and impressive, and the tears forced their way down Alice's pale cheeks as Mr. Hare dwelt upon the brief life here—the endless life beyond. She was too much touched to notice the little peculiarities which, at a happier time, would quickly strike her ear. The hymns

—and Alice was fond of hymns—were sung with a rugged pathos, which reminded her of hills, and dales, and rocky glens.

Alice went thoughtfully home, Tib remaining to walk with the procession to the burial-ground. On her return she found her young mistress busy with pen and paper.

“Tib, how many children are there in the village?”

“It swarms with them, Miss Alice.”

“But babies, Tib, real babies?”

“Well, real babies? About a dozen, I suppose.”

“Tib, I’m going to have a crèche.”

“A what, Miss Alice?” And Tib’s voice was full of genuine surprise.

Alice laughed.

“I have found work at last,” she said. “There must be no more babies burned to death; whilst I sit at home with nothing to do, these poor women go out to daily toil, harassed with troubles, either carrying their babies with them, or enduring the agony of suspense, if they are left behind. There are such places in London, Tib, where the babies are left every morning, and ladies see after them. Why should not I do the same thing, and be responsible for their safe keeping? We must have some young girls as nurses, and you and I, Tib, must amuse them, and keep them alive.”

“How will you like to hear them crying all day long?” asked Tib, delighted in her heart, yet wishing to show up the little difficulties of the undertaking.

“Oh,” said Alice, brightly, “we shall teach them to crow instead.”

In the evening Tib walked through the village with

her lady's message, and asking for the mothers' opinion. There could be but one, and not content without seeing and thanking her, nearly all the mothers went to the cottage.

One pretty young woman, with the tears in her loving eyes, said, "God bless you, ma'am; we'll leave our little ones with you, and welcome; but my 'man' and me think it will be too much for you."

"Oh, no," said Alice; "it must be a great deal of work to be too much for me just now."

Another said, "I was just telling my 'man' that I couldn't go no more to the field; I'd never settle, but I'd think as how I heard my baby screaming, like Mrs. Blair's did; God bless you, ma'am, and He will," she added with fervour, "for helping the poor."

Alice was glad her thought succeeded; all spoke warm thanks, and far and near the "good lady" was talked of.

The next day Alice found, for the first time for weeks, that she was almost too busy to think—ever so much to be done—cradles carried by grateful fathers, in the early morning, and placed in the room, which Tib had hurriedly prepared, and every voice spoke a blessing. Then baby after baby came in its mother's arms, with appliances for feeding, and such directions as an experienced person always gives to a novice. Tib was at home among them at once, and to Alice's surprise a pat of the hand, deftly administered, sent one of them to sleep in a moment. They all slept, and Alice said "How little trouble they give;" but by-and-by one after another blue eye peeped out, and hungry mouths opened, like little fledglings, and clamoured for

food; and Tib cleverly took each little tiny bark in tow, placed a supply of food on board, gave another of those soothing taps, and the little bark was laid up in port, sleeping soundly once more. Alice took lessons, and soon became expert enough to relieve the wants of the little ones herself, patting them to sleep, too, with the legitimate "touch."

When the first day's experience was over she was not discouraged; and when the babies were called for by the happy mothers, with thanks and blessings, she felt the truth of Tib's remark: "Work, to be a blessing, must be for others."

Alice had drawn up no rules, though Tib and she agreed, without constituting themselves either a "board" or a "committee," that the children must be removed each evening, and that the home was for infants. But in a day or two, when the mothers represented that the little ones, able to toddle, and not able to take care of themselves, were more trouble and care, even, than the infants, what could Alice do but let them come? They were hard to manage, and for a week or two kept the cottage in a perpetual storm of crying. Just old enough to miss the familiar face and to be "strange" at sight of a new one, these little ones disturbed Alice greatly; she was afraid they would injure themselves with crying, but Tib took it coolly, as a matter of course, knowing that it would hurt the sturdy shouters no more than constant crowing hurts a young ambitious cock. She saw with pleasure how much the thought of them occupied her young mistress. One bawling brat had to be provided with a sister to take charge of him, so violent

were the fits of sobbing he fell into on waking without the mother's face.

One day this urchin was sleeping in his little crib, and his sister took advantage of the few moments to go off to her mother with some milk. Alice took her post as watcher, and presently Tib, who was occupied in some other matter, heard the stentorian roar of the young cub. She would not go in, wishing her mistress to have the trouble. The roaring continued, and Tib, curious to know how things went on, peeped in. Alice sat on a low stool, a pretty white dressing-gown, tied with pink ribbons, thrown round her shoulders, and gathered to her as his mother might, was the child, who looked in her face, and bellowed lustily, whilst she used every little wile to soothe it, but all in vain. Tib smiled at the picture, and withdrew. At last the strong shouts were growing weaker, ending in sobs growing fainter, probably from exhaustion, then ceased altogether. By the time Tib was ready to reconnoitre again, she found Miss Alice and the boy having a game of romps together, he really crowing with delight as he toddled after the little red waggon she held by a string. Tib, standing at the open door, looked in, and thought, "Oh, if poor Mr. Godfrey could see her now!"

XIII.

ABOUT noon on a hot summer day a poor young creature, with all the appearance of a tramp, presented herself at the cottage. She was covered with dust and limped painfully, but from her tattered and mended shawl she drew forth a baby bright and clean in the midst of seeming sin and squalor.

"I heard of you, and came to you; will you take my baby?"

Alice explained the rules and object of the home to her. She felt sorry for the woman, but how could she keep her little one? But the woman had come too far to be put off with a first refusal, so calling after Alice's retreating figure in no very gentle and yet no rough mood, she cried—

"Come here, ma'am; you see I like the look of you. God stamped you, so He did, and I want this one," dropping her eyes on the sleeping child, "to be real good, and you could make it that. See here now, if you take it I'll look for work hereabouts; it's all the same to me where I am."

"My poor woman," said Alice, "I'm sorry for you, but I cannot take your child. These children are taken home every night."

"I'll take it home too," eagerly answered the woman. "I must get a spot to lie down in, and it can lie with me; there, now. I want it to be good, I tell you." She spoke with a sort of fierceness. "And it's hard for the poor to be good."

"How can I trust you to come back?" asked Alice, well inclined to take the baby.

"Sure you have me when you have *that*," she blazed out, presenting the little one again, and Alice took it. "You must make it good, mind that, and make it be said by you, I'll come again."

Tib did not approve, but you see Alice's rules were very elastic, and the baby was lovely, and the mother and baby together were interesting. As the little one was undressed, it showed clearly that love belongs to

no class, for its clothing, though of the very poorest and scantiest, was scrupulously clean, and the little sleeves had their tatters tied up with pieces of discoloured blue ribbon.

"Ah, Tib," said Alice, with the tears in her eyes, "the mother cannot be all wrong, and love her baby so."

"It's a sweet child, to be sure, and more like a lady's than a tramp's," said sober Tib, who was bringing a placid smile to the baby's face by drawing in her breath through her puckered-up lips, and imitating the chirp of a bird.

It was late, and still no sign of the mother. Baby slept between snowy sheets; one little hand, as delicately pink as the inside of a sea-shell, lay like a crumpled rose-leaf by the velvet cheek. Alice watched it, never tiring, thinking of many things the while. It was very late when a tap came to the window, and the poor woman of the morning, but cleaner and fresher, came in. When Alice turned, her eyes met a face of no common order; and when Tib brought her to the cradle of the sleeping child, the woman suddenly and fiercely stooped over and kissed its little face, then looking at Alice, she burst into tears, and sobbed as if her heart would break.

"Don't stop me," she said; "I wouldn't cry when I ought, and now I can't help it when I see the baby safe and sound. Oh, make it good!"

"I'll do my best," said Alice, greatly touched.

"Oh, ma'am, I can't take it away to-night, for I couldn't get a spot; they are shy of a stranger, and I don't blame them, but I'll get somewhere to-morrow, see if I don't."

"And where will you spend the night?"

The woman laughed.

"Lord bless you, where I often spent it before, tucked under a hedge."

Alice was learning many lessons.

"I could not rest," she said, "and think of you exposed to such danger. Tib, cannot we do something?"

Tib answered very alertly.

"I'll see if Jane Norris has a corner—come with me."

And she was very glad to get her away, for, as she afterwards said, "Miss Alice would think nothing of giving up her own bed and sleeping on the sofa."

The corner was easily found, when it was to "oblige" the good lady.

And this is how Alice's hands became full and busy, and she buried her own sorrow out of sight, not forgetting it, but sanctifying it in thought, and work for other than herself. Like all young girls, she was fond of children, gently born, and prettily dressed; but a common baby, of common people, was quite a different thing. However, by degrees it dawned on her, with Tib's help, that this life cannot be all passed in doing and having our heart's desire, but that we must be helpers of those who are ready to faint, stretching forth our hands, as we must do, if we would "bear one another's burdens." And having begun this good work, she found in it her own salvation; for with hands and head fully occupied, she felt herself better able to await the unravelling of her own knotted life, and she was not without another reward too. She had won the love and respect of her poor neighbours, as well as the more demonstrative affection of the children of the

village. The little crowing baby of a few months would jump in its mother's arms at sight of her sweet face and sweeter smile, stretching out its little fat fists to her, and gurgling with delight. Some people would not value such love; but to the sorrowing love is riches, and one grain of it, pure and true, is worth living for. He who, in his pride and lavish wealth, spurns it now, may come to an hour in life when it, and it alone, can turn from him the sharpness of death and desertion. The power of loving, and forgiving, are some of the very few marks left in us of the Divine. Alice went in and out of the cottages like a sunbeam, as free and welcome, and her unspoken wishes came to be known and fulfilled. The doorstep was kept cleaner because she trod it with her dainty feet. The windows were brightened, because she was sure to stop and admire the geraniums. Imperceptibly her influence was raising them in their own respect, and many a refractory boy was brought to her, when father and mother failed to induce him to go to school. She told him stories of heroism and adventure, until he was ready to cry "Let me go." Then she explained to him the uses of learning, how it fitted him with weapons, which, rightly used, would conquer the lions in his path; and the promise of "Robinson Crusoe," when he was able to read it, flashed before his imagination, as the Victoria Cross glimmered before the eyes of the wounded hero of the Redan. And in due time he bore away his prize, having first, with sparkling eyes and flushing cheek, read aloud to her the first chapter of that Shakspeare of children.

The tramp's baby became the pet and pride of the

cottage. The mother got work to do, which she performed well and silently; and the "corner" at Jane Norris's became her own. No one could object to her—she was so silent, inoffensive, and cleanly in all her habits; but Alice could not let the little lily be soiled by such contact, and she kept the baby, to the poor mother's unbounded delight. She came every morning and evening with proffers of help; sometimes kissing it with a violence of passion, and crying over it wildly, but never altering her petition, "Oh, make it good." Its name, she said, was Clair, but she must do as she was bid. Little Clair came with the flowers, and seemed to grow like them—silently and sweetly.

And Tib was sorely puzzled, for she doubted not but that it was the child of sin, and yet love it she must. Was she right? She answered herself by remembering Him who went about doing good, not to the well-born and rich alone, but to the outcast and beggar. For I have signally failed to set Tib properly before you if you pronounce her "goody." There was no "shoddy" about Tib, least of all in her goodness. She loved the child—was it not one of God's creatures? The baby's mother never spoke of husband or father, and when, with the falling leaf and gathered corn, she was heard to cough, and her cheeks grew thin and hollow, but bright as the autumn leaf, and her eyes grew large and sad, Tib knew that the little Clair would be an orphan before the next wood lilies bloomed. She was as industrious and silent as ever; but it took her a longer time to go and come from her work. And when Alice heard of it, she forbid her to work any more, and day after day mother and child might be seen sitting in

the sunshine. A very few days were all she had of life. She knew it before the doctor, whom Alice called in, formally announced it. The knowledge did not seem to make her more sad or sorrowful, only like one with a great deal to do, and little time for doing it. She scattered her love with lavish hands upon her baby, sometimes murmuring over it, "It is best for you, my darling, best for you." One day she said to Alice,

"I wonder what will become of me, ma'am, when I die?"

"If you love God here you will go to Him there," said Alice, glad to find her in a talking mood.

"Will you teach this one to love Him?"

"Indeed I will; to love Him above all things."

"And she'll go to Him when she dies?"

"I hope so."

"Oh," said the woman, "worse than the cough, and worse than the pain, is the thought that I'll not be before her."

"Why?" asked Alice; "all who love God will go to heaven, and He is no respecter of persons."

"That's not it," said the other, doggedly; "I'll never get there, for it would take years to make me fit, and I'll not live weeks."

"A moment will fit you if you come out of yourself and your sins, and trust in Christ."

And Alice sitting under a stunted beech-tree, with the sea glancing and glinting in the sun, told the poor woman the story of the thief, and when she had finished, tears were trickling down the wasted, hectic cheek of the listener.

"What is it to trust in Christ?"

"You trust in me to keep and take care of your baby; just trust Christ the same way to keep and take care of you. Pray to Him, and He will help you."

"That's it again," groaned the poor creature. "I don't know how to pray, and it would take months anyway, to teach me."

"You came that day and asked me to take this little one. I refused. You persisted in asking, and you prevailed with me; that was praying, only be as earnest for yourself as you were for it."

"I'll try," was all the answer given.

She asked to be allowed to undress and wash her baby that night, and of her it might be literally said that she washed it with her tears, and dried it with the hairs of her head. They left them together. Tib going in after a little, found her by the baby's bedside, kneeling, with head bowed upon her clasped hands, asking forgiveness of Him for her many sins. So Tib thought, but on looking closer, she found she was not there; perhaps the answer had come with the prayer, and she heard a voice say, "Friend, come up higher," and her confusion was covered by a wedding garment; who knows?

Mrs. Dodson was proud of her husband's relatives, and was subject to "talking fits" about her husband's niece, Alice Harvey. Not that she had any doubts as to her whereabouts; she laughed at anyone who was simple enough to disbelieve it. Why wouldn't she go to the squire? She had no idea of girls being too prudish; she had not thought Alice had so much in

her. "What is the chief end of man?" was a solemn question, but easily answered as regarded women. "To be married," that, and that alone, being her end and aim. Mrs. Dodson had done her duty manfully, and now she had her reward. Manifold were the hints which she dropped, golden grain, which, in a fertile soil, would yield a rich harvest. One of these "means" was the many uses which could be made of a pocket-handkerchief. Nellie opened her eyes in well-bred astonishment.

"Oh, Miss Innocence, don't be a cheat, and pretend not to know what I mean," laughed Mrs. Dodson.

"I cannot plead ignorance of what you mean," answered Nellie; "but how could any lady act so?"

"I know a lady myself—'awfully' good family, rather passé—got acquainted with a nice young man by letting him pick up her handkerchief for her, and they are married. What do you think of that?"

The young governess was not interested in the straits to which silly women are driven, and she remained silent. Young girls of seventeen, or good women of any age, do not think marriage "all of life to live for," although Mrs. Dodson confessed to having done such a thing herself, and in the matter of goodness she was "all right."

The outside world of Hacklebury dissected her every act, and commented on all her movements, from the feeding of Snooks—the young gentlemen's late tutor—to the style of bonnet she wore, which in their eyes was more "cocky" than the age of her widowhood allowed. Not a table in the town at which she was not served up; and when one of her servants, in

answer to her mistress's oft-repeated inquiry, "What do they say of me?" let her into the secret, she raised her eyes, astonished what anyone could see in "poor little quiet me!" She took it as a compliment, just as she took being stared at, and she was not going to be silent if Nellie was, so she ran on :

"Have you found out yet who that gentleman is who walks with the Miss Browns?"

"No," said Nellie, unable to resist a laugh at the emphatic "yet."

"I hear he admired you immensely," but as this elicited no remark, Mrs. Dodson laughed loud and long at the colour which flashed into Nellie's face.

She was not flattered by the announcement that the gentleman with the "military air" admired her. She remembered painfully having met him one day when she was walking with Mrs. Dodson, and he turned and stared at them or her, it mattered not which, in a rude, ungentlemanly manner. She had gone straight to her glass on reaching home, expecting to see four heads on her shoulders at the very least. She saw a fair face flushed, and a young innocent look in her blue eyes. It never once occurred to her that her face could be the attraction, and finding nothing extraordinary in either her dress or appearance, she forgot all about it. Mrs. Dodson had brought it all back to her now, and she coloured with shame and confusion, while the fat sides of the sportive widow shook with merriment.

"Eh dear!" she said, wiping her eyes, "I'm 'awfully' tender over a heart affection; and if the gentleman comes to me, I will promise to help him."

"Mrs. Dodson!" said Nellie, aghast, and the very tone conveyed a lesson, "you surely don't mean what you say?"

"I certainly do, my dear; he looks a man of birth, and he may be of great use to me with those boys of mine."

What could Nellie say to this? She prudently kept the "bit of her mind" to herself, thinking it very unlikely Mrs. Dodson should ever be called upon for her good offices, and it was at this very time that her dear old Tibbins came and was a comfort to her.

"Oh, Tib," she said, "I like teaching, and I love the children, but Mrs. Dodson is 'funny;' she is always talking of men and marrying, and I can't bear it."

"The like of her always do, Miss Nellie. Don't mind her, my pet; and when your time comes, you'll get what's in store for you without foolish talking."

Poor Nellie had never loved anyone better than her father for many a year, but she had found out many things since then; amongst them, that she was nothing to him; a new face had come between her and home, and she was content it should be so. Her brain was not without its castles, and she had her dreams like other girls. At times she pictured a true brave man who might, if he came to know her, value and love her, putting her first—that she must have—in his life and love; to such, she felt she could give truthfully and lavishly of her heart's best.

One evening she had come in from a pleasant ramble in the woods with the boys—those very woods round Clewbend through which Godfrey roamed in search of

his divinity. The boys delighted in filling their hands with wild flowers, and then, perfume-laden, question Nellie as to their treasures. This evening they had all scampered off in search of ferns, all but Herbert, who, with Nellie, sat under a fir-tree, delighting in the peculiar smell of the cones, and enjoying the flushing of the fading sunlight.

"Miss Harcourt," said Herbert, "next Wednesday is my birthday, and I always have a party."

"How old shall you be then?" she inquired.

"Eleven," said the boy, "and you must ask mamma to send me to school."

"I shall do so with pleasure, Herbert. Shall I tell her you are 'beyond' my teaching?"

"Don't laugh, please," said the boy; "I hated the thought of school before you came, but now I want to grow up and be a man."

"And come home to be the head of the house?" suggested Nellie.

"No, never home here; mamma would 'strap' me all the same, I do believe, if you were gone; and no man could stand that. How old are you?" he asked, looking suddenly into his teacher's face.

"Ever so old," laughed Nellie. "I was seventeen last May."

"Only six years older than me, and you are so much wiser and cleverer than all of us—even mamma."

"Oh, don't speak so, or I shall think myself seventy instead of seventeen!"

"I want to spend my next birthday in the woods. If I did what I really liked I should spend it with you alone; but I know what you would call that, and

besides," he added, with the air of a grande signor, "the children would be disappointed."

"Why should you like to spend it with me alone?" asked Nellie. "I did not think I was a good enough 'fellah,' in your eyes, to content you."

"Good! you are to me the best in all the world. 'Content?' If you would only try me, I should be content never to look upon another face on earth—or heaven," murmured the boy, his cheeks burning, and his eyes kindling. She looked at him, he at her. "There, now," he said, "you'll hate me."

She took his hand and drew him towards her.

"I always hoped you would love me; but it seems you have outstripped my hopes. You must not love me too much. Herbert, I never had a brother; will you be one to me, and promise me a brother's love?"

"I cannot," he said, and burst into tears.

Nellie left him and went in search of the truants; she found them eagerly listening to Cousin Alec's account of a squirrel he had caught. After a pleasant hour Herbert had to be hunted up to come homewards. Alec found him lying on his face, at the foot of the fir tree; but he would not stir till Nellie came to fetch him. Alec indignantly told her she was spoiling the boy, but she was tender towards him in her thoughts and went. He got up pale and thoughtful.

"Will you really take me for your brother?"

"Gladly," and taking hold of both his hands, she kissed him on both cheeks.

"May not a brother kiss his sister as often as he likes, and call her by her name?"

"Yes," said Nellie, laughing.

"Then I promise to be your loving brother." And the ambitious youth threw his arms about her and pressed his lips to hers as if he would seal her to him for ever.

When she was free she boxed his ears; the children enjoyed the fun and screamed with delight. Only Alec stood aloof, shy and silent.

"Ah," he thought, "if I could only take her to me and hold her like that, I'd be the happiest fellow alive."

And he walked by her side, taking courage to press her hand at the little green door before he turned homewards again, through the same woods—not quite the same to him, for everything was touched by the magic of his thoughts.

A servant had told Nellie that Mrs. Dodson desired her to go to the drawing-room whenever she returned.

"It may be my father," thought the girl, as she thrust her fingers through her hair in an admonitory way. It was almost dark, but Nellie saw the widow sitting in her best style, in her best silk, and by her side sat the man with the military air. She was nearly doing a foolish thing, for seeing the state of the case, she was going to run out, but Mrs. Dodson turned to her.

"This is Miss Harcourt, Captain Blundell; allow me to introduce you."

The captain started to his feet, drew his legs together, and inclined the upper half of himself in a horizontal position. Nellie drew back to leave him plenty of room for his 'manceuvres,' and making a

modest inclination toward him, she turned to Mrs. Dodson, saying,

"I have left the boys at their tea, had I not better go to them?" at the same time moving towards the door.

"Stop, my dear; you will do no such thing. Captain Blundell has been waiting a long time to see you, and I'll not have him treated like that—sit down."

So Nellie sat down on the edge of her chair as cautiously as if it had been a four-footed beast; while the captain stood over her gurgling—

"Aw, great pleasure—cruel, aw—walking, eh?"

"She has been walking with my children," said the widow, answering for her, as she used for the poor deceased Mr. Dodson.

Meanwhile Nellie felt in a strangely awkward position. To hear that a gentleman had been waiting to see her implied that he had something to say. What could he, a stranger to her and hers, want with her? Her awkwardness was not lessened by Mrs. Dodson answering for her, and leaving her nothing to say. If he had been waiting for her, the sooner he told his business the better.

The captain still stood over her, and his gurgling made her think of a cat purring over a captured mouse; if she moved would he spring upon her?

Mrs. Dodson began quizzing him about the Miss Browns, as if resuming an interrupted topic.

"Don't tell me, captain, I have seen how the land lay in that quarter—now don't tell me you don't know if they have large fortunes, I hear it is *all* they

have." The captain gallantly declared they were nice girls.

"Not charming, you know—aw—but fair!"

"Are they *your* style?" she asked, with sundry winks at Nellie.

"Rawtha," he drawled, "though I prefer my peach with a little more bloom on it—haw, haw." Then, turning quickly to Nellie, he asked if she was fond of walking.

Nellie almost sprang from her seat; the simile of the cat and the mouse had not left her. Calming down, she answered, "Yes, very; I have been accustomed to walk every day."

"Would you like to join her sometimes, captain?" broke in the widow, with a merry twinkle in her eye.

"I should be only too happy, if Miss Harcourt would permit it."

"If I did you would be only too sorry," answered Nellie, pleasantly; "for, of course, you understand that a governess must take advantage of every mode of conveying instruction. Our walks are generally devoted to easy lessons in botany."

"I should be too much honoured to join your class. I have a particular fancy for that sort of thing, and you would be horrified to find how ignorant I am."

Mrs. Dodson enjoyed this passage of arms, if one judged from her repeated laughter. She thought the captain too great a match for Nellie, and she looked on, self-interested in the game.

"Try me for awhile," continued he, "and I submit to be expelled if I don't behave myself."

"I cannot," said Nellie. "I should very much dis-

like a new pupil, particularly an ignorant one. I therefore decline the honour you intended me."

And seeing that "passing his time" was what he particularly wanted with her, she rose, and with a little curtesy passed from the room.

"That's always the way," said Mrs. Dodson as the door closed. "Your shy people are the stiffest after all; but, never mind gazing so steadfastly after her into heaven, don't be down-hearted; Herbert, my eldest son, is going to have a birthday party. Will you come if I ask you for Wednesday evening? better luck then."

"Many thanks; I shall be delighted—aw."

Mrs. Dodson rang for glasses to cement their friendship in sherry, though the captain had not yet dined.

"Dooood odd woman," he thought, as he sauntered towards Brownemount. "All the airs of a beauty! haw, haw; but what a real one that girl is." And he haw-hawed as he thought of her shyness.

XIV.

THE next day a letter, so deeply bordered with black as to leave only an inch white in the centre, was presented to the captain; it bore the coat of arms of the ancient house of Dodson. The note was as follows:—

"DEAR CAPTAIN BLUNDELL,

"I find that, instead of an evening party on Wednesday next, my son has decided on a pic-nic in the Clewbend woods. You might pick up a little in-

formation on botany if our dining at two o'clock will not prevent you from joining such Goths. Be assured I shall be delighted to see you.

"Yours sincerely,

"OPHELIA DODSON."

The captain decided on going to the pic-nic, and he also decided that Mrs. Dodson's sponsors were responsible for her silliness. Who could be sensible and answer to the name of Ophelia?

That particular Wednesday was not as most watched-for days; it was not wet, nor likely to be so. The boys were up at daybreak to pack hampers which they could not find, but they lifted roses out of their bath of dew, and picked flowers before they were awake, for they knew Nellie never made merry or feasted without sharing it with flowers, and Brickie ran to her door calling out, "Tum to de pit-nit." Alec, of course, was amongst those invited, so was Miss Norton, but she had no "heart for gaiety." Alec, bright and holiday-like, drove to the door with his trap, on which the hampers were to be stowed away, over the safety of which Herbert was to mount guard. The other children were sent off in a cab with nurse. So, when Alec asked Nelly to sit with him on the box-seat, she saw no harm in saying "yes." No one, perhaps, knows how much it costs a shy man to be polite. If Alec had thought over the matter he never should have succeeded, but seeing Nelly so bright and good, giving Herbert all manner of warnings about this particular hamper, because it had a pie in it, and that other had a jar of custard, he could not resist by the

from their padded stomachs the delicious ducks, the swimming pies and puddings. The hamper altogether devoted to long-necked bottles, except the "Irishman's corner," where the squat mother sits full to the throat of cold punch. And when the hampers are disposed of, come the natty little baskets covered with vine and fig leaves, and twigged over by thoughtful gardeners, beneath which repose the peaches, plums, pears, etc., as different to the ordinary "at home" fruit as the apples of Sodom are to the golden fruit of the Hesperides. You can have dessert at home, but not the flavour the woods give it. What matter if a wasp does fall into your cream; take him by the legs and lay him carefully to dry on a leaf of the Aristolochia. He, too, was pic-nicing, remember, but he met with an accident.

Alec began the day well, and handing over his trap to one of the grooms, he prepared himself for doing still better. Mrs. Dodson was accompanied by two Miss Pennithornes, one of whom was brought especially on Alec's account. They were frank, jolly girls, delighted with everything—with the drive, with Mrs. Dodson, with Nellie, with the boys, with themselves! They found it charming to dine at the luncheon hour. Miss Yuke had also come; she was Mrs. Dodson's "friend," a "little girl" of about fifty or thereabouts. She could never look at a man without "blushing," and as she very often looked, it gave her that burned-in look on her cheeks, which she was fond of alluding to as her "complexion." Seeing she had Captain Blundell sitting with his back to her, and not knowing the moment he might turn round, she had been

kept in a state of conflagration during their short drive; and as he jumped down, and she found herself the first to take his helping hand, she became a complete cinder, and now stood on the green sward, putting out the fire as well as she could by sopping her cheeks with her handkerchief. The Dodson boys called her Moses' Bush. Nellie felt inclined to lead her away and cool her by gentle walking, but Miss Yuke had "cut" her since she became a governess. "Boundaries, my dear, must be respected." The Miss Pennithornes hinted that the woods looked very inviting, "might they," etc. But Herbert, who was master for the day, decided on dinner first, "dawdling" after. So Mrs. Dodson walked off with her friends till dinner was ready, calling Captain Blundell to her with the air of a beauty. Laying the cloth would have been more in his line, but he obeyed, making himself look more disconsolate by a trick he had of drawing his beard full length.

Herbert had decided on the very tree under which they were to dine. The love for these woods was no sentiment with him, but a part of his life. So they all trooped off to this tree, happy as they could be. Alec had made himself necessary by inventing knots which no one but himself could undo, and he made himself so useful that Nellie found she had nothing to do, a state of things so unusual that the boys screamed at it as the best fun in the world.

"I have nothing to do either," said Herbert, "so I'll have a kiss while Alec is drawing those corks."

"Stop!" said Alec, brandishing his corkscrew round his head. "Not another; it makes me as hungry as a

hawk," and Alec turned to his work with a face rivalling Miss Yuke's. The boys danced with delight, while Alec glanced at Nellie to see how she had taken it just as she was glancing at him, so they wisely joined in the laugh. The children were in their places, and the two 'gentlemen summoned the rest of the party, and everything went off better than had been expected, and this is saying much. The gentlemen proposed toasts, and everyone drank Herbert's health. The poor boy was strangely puzzled when his mother informed him he must get up and make a speech, but it ended in his getting on his feet and saying, "I thank you all." There was much talking and much merriment, and after dinner everyone prepared to "dawdle."

Alec went off with the two Miss Pennithornes, laughing merrily. Nellie found herself by the captain's side. She felt very little inclined for talking; it seemed as if in that bright, pleasant drive she had had her day's share of happiness. She felt content with it; she would have liked to sit down by one of those trees and cry—whether from joy or sadness who can guess? There is a pleasure in going over with oneself what has been.

Miss Yuke kept near the captain as moths flutter round the flame of a candle, and Nellie hoped she would join them, but suddenly, as if in answer to some inaudible cry of "roast beef," she whirled round and quickly joined Mrs. Dodson. Nellie roused herself to listen to the gurglings of her companion. She found him able to talk very well, so she was content to listen. By-and-by he glided into talking of him-

self, and grew eloquent over his own and his family's history. The history had one hero, which he believed in, and he strove to bring his listener to believe in him too. She could not help admiring the adroit way in which he wheeled his conversation round to their first interview, and he again asked if she would change her severe decision in his favour. It took the captain a longer time than ever he remembered in his life to get his companion into his track. He did not choose to startle her by a too open flirtation, and so he had to come a long way round indeed. But his prudence was unavailing. Nellie would not flirt: she could do it as well as any woman when she wished, but in this instance, however skilfully he threw his line, she would not rise to it. He asked himself if it was all innocence or all art? He was getting angry, feeling himself ill-used.

"You seem very careful of yourself," he said, with a short laugh.

"There is no one to be careful of me but myself. I have no brother; my father is otherwise engaged. I am young and alone."

"But," he whispered, "you would not be alone. I should take the greatest care of you."

"I am different from others," she answered, calmly. "I have my living to make, and the world is very bitter at times. I must consult it."

"These woods—aw," said the captain; "one could saunter here for days. 'The world forgetting, by the world forgot'—aw—you know."

"Even should the world forget me, I hope I shall never forget myself," said Nellie.

"Pardon me; do you not think you are over care-

ful? Why draw back before you are stung?—aw—you are very cruel.”

“I do not see the cruelty, Captain Blundell. I suppose this is the way gentlemen talk and amuse themselves. If I had nothing to do, I might idle away the hours. When one has work to do it makes one——” she stopped.

“Sensible,” said he, laughing, as he finished the sentence for her.

“I am not busy, therefore——?” and he questioned her, with his eyes looking unutterable things into hers.

Nelly coloured up; she could not help it.

“I only speak for myself,” she said. “It is a man’s greatest misfortune to be idle, but one which everybody can remedy for himself. When it is not remedied you content yourselves with ‘love-making,’ quite satisfied if a woman allows you to go on until she is ‘stung.’ Is there no other amusement manlier and healthier? You have never met me but once in your life, and you beg for favours which it is ‘cruel’ to refuse; and suppose I granted them all, what would you do?”

Instead of answering he looked sheepish, and tugged vigorously at his blonde beard. She was amused at his schoolboy look, though he brought this castigation on himself.

“Remember, you offered to take a lesson from me?” she said, laughing brightly.

“You take it in too serious a light, I assure you. Most ladies like it. There’s nothing in it, you know, as a rule.”

“I know—‘pour passer le temps;’ but there is something higher and nobler for a man to follow than his

own pleasure, and women should hold a higher place in your esteem than mere playthings."

"Miss Harcourt," he said, speaking earnestly, and without drawling, "judge me when I tell you you are the first lady who was ever dissatisfied with me. Women as a rule spoil us by flattery. I have learned a lesson which I thank you for, and which I hope will make us friends for life. You are the very first woman I ever met out of my own family for whom I have felt the least respect."

"Oh, Captain Blundell, it is you who are severe now. I am quite sorry to have extracted such a cruel speech from you. I am afraid I have been a most stupid companion ; but here comes our party."

"Tea in the wood"—crowning delight of the day to the boys. Faggots to be collected, kettle to be boiled, regular camping out. "Oh, how grand!" screamed Brick. Alec came to Nellie's assistance, and the captain also presented himself for a commission.

"You cannot refuse," he said, "or you will throw down your own theory."

"Someone must go to the spring and fill the kettle," she suggested, with a bright glance, but she never meant him to take it up as he did, striding off, with Herbert as guide, coming back and cleverly propping his burden on two solid blocks of hard wood, between which the faggots were laid ready for lighting. Nellie liked him better than she thought she ever could, and she told him his cup of tea would be the best he ever drank. All the party sat down to watch the kettle boil, in the face of the old adage. And Alec lay like a gipsy feeding the fire, and watching the

showers of crackling embers fall. Mrs. Dodson's tongue was running freely ; she had got on the topic of Alice Harvey, and the whole story was repeated to the captain.

"Very strange—aw—very," said he, occupied as usual. "And no one knows where she is?"

"Oh!" said Mrs. Dodson, laughing, "*I'm* not in any doubt she is very comfortable as Mrs. Godfrey Bennimore."

Alec had just added another huge branch to the spluttering fire. He turned as his aunt spoke.

"Alice Harvey is not with Godfrey Bennimore. No friend of hers, or mine, will believe it."

"Oh, Alec, excuse me ; I forgot you were there ; that comes from your silence ; but now, as I have said it, don't be ridiculous ! If you loved a woman yourself"—and here she winked at Miss Pennithorne—"and bid her come to you, wouldn't you expect her to obey?"

"I might bid her do many a thing, aunt, but the woman I love won't do wrong for the bidding."

Captain Blundell asked if young Bennimore, who was up for Leconfield, was any relative of the squire's. "I know him—met him in London ; a very clever fellow."

"Immensely clever!" and Mrs. Dodson dilated upon Clarence, who was always her favourite.

"A splendid match for you girls—any of you ; but he has 'cut' us all lately."

The kettle boiled, the tea was made, and cakes and buns disappeared ; bread and jam and honey got made away with too, and everyone voted "tea in a wood" the best part of a pic-nic. The fire had fallen into a mass of embers, red and glowing : no one seemed inclined to stir.

"Can't some of you boys amuse us?" said someone not inclined to talk.

Herbert proposed that everyone should give out a riddle. "Original ones, you know," he said to Nellie.

"Oh, Herbert, not original, I beg of you," said Miss Yuke, with her hand supporting her burning cheek. "I shrink from anything original: I was all my life opposed to it."

"If you could make one, you wouldn't be so opposed to it," said the unpolished Lionel.

"I am afraid," said the captain, laughing, "I must follow Miss Yuke's lead and shrink from it too."

"Here goes," said Alec. "Why is a full stop in reading like a song?"

There was no end of guessing.

"D'ye give it up?" inquired its author.

"Yes," came from all.

"Because it's a round delay (roundelay)!"

It was the captain's turn next, but he had to be passed over.

Mrs. Dodson asked "on the spirt of the moment," "Why is a cork like a shy lover?"

"Because it requires to be drawn out."

Both the Miss Pennithornes giggled when asked—both declared they were not clever enough; and both exclaimed in one breath, "Oh, do go on!"

Herbert now called on Nellie. She asked, "Why is a bell a good secret keeper?—Because it never tells anything, it is told (toll'd)."

"First-rate, Miss Harcourt; that's the best we've had!" exclaimed Herbert.

"I think mine was a very good one too," said Alec,

with a beaming face. "Come now, Herbert, it is your turn."

"Why is truth like my boot?"

"Like your boot!" cried Lionel. "Oh, stuff—that's a bad one. How could it be like your boot?"

"D'ye give it up?"

The captain modestly suggested it might have something to do with putting his foot in it.

"Because it's unpalatable."

Alec cried "Hurra!" Miss Yuke said it was very original; Mrs. Dodson said she couldn't see it; and the Miss Pennithornes exclaimed, "How clever!"

"Be quick, Lionel," said Herbert, "out with yours."

"Why is a donkey better than a man?"—"Because the donkey has an i in his tail, and the man hasn't one in his head."

"Oh, dear!" said Mrs. Dodson; "my feet are all pins and needles. Come, captain, you and I will have a walk, and leave these children round the fire."

The captain, to judge from his look, would have preferred being a child too; but, pulling his unlucky beard, he went.

The evening was glorious. It was just a time and scene when those who love can be silent and happy; but the merry widow never connected silence with anything but being "put out," for the happier she was, the freer ran her tongue. She amused her companion. As they walked along she suddenly put her hand on his arm, and limping on one foot, she acknowledged that she was in pain. Something must have got into her boot. The captain seated her on a felled tree, and insisted on relieving her by taking off the boot.

“Eh, dear, I couldn’t hear of such a thing.”

He was on one knee before her, and begged to be allowed as a favour. He went farther—she would offend him by denying him the pleasure of relieving her pain.

“If there was any one here itself,” she said, presenting to the captain as pretty a boot as he had ever seen. “You’re awfully kind,” she said to him, as he stood beside her with the empty boot in his hand, while she relieved the pressure. The boot somehow got on again, but not before the captain complimented her on her exquisite feet, etc.

“Oh, don’t say ankles,” she said, laughing up at him. “My feet and hands are the best of me;” and she presented him her small plump hand, her well-ringed fingers looking small and white.

He took it in his, he held it, and admired it. He said it had no bone, and to test the truth of his statement he was obliged to squeeze it; he said it was a pleasure to him to hold it; so she left it with him, or forgot it; and they strolled still farther, her hand resting on his arm, while his flirted with the ringed fingers. A beautiful calm peace fell on them; the very leaves beneath their feet were turned to gold; and the gradual, mysterious dropping down of twilight was shrouding them. Captain Blundell was in a dream, everything about him soothed and lulled his senses: a woman’s hand close pressed within his own, a woman’s arm lightly resting on his, and a woman’s voice murmuring in his ear. He was perfectly happy, and would have been content to go through life so, without awaking. Might he not as well secure his happi-

ness while he could? It was easy; the work of a moment: steal his arm round her waist, press his lips to hers, and call her his own. She would understand him. Would he do it?

That moment a light, happy laugh came to them through the wood, followed by sounds of general merriment. The captain awakened, and felt as if the voice brought him back from the edge of a precipice, and he, in his own way, thanked God. Mrs. Dodson drew her hand from his, as if she was caught doing something wrong. Had he not been awakened, he would have drawn her farther from the interruption, but shivering, as if from cold, he hurried to what was natural and true.

The "children" were in the midst of "blind man's buff" without bandaging! The captain was soon in the "thick of the fight," first catching Brick, to that scrap's infinite delight, and next catching Miss Yuke, who seemed to run into his arms, and then stood awe-stricken when she got there.

Great was the fun, and loud the uproar, until the home cry came. "Everything gets done with, and that's the worst of it," was Alec's closing remark. The children were packed off with nurse, and Nellie wondered if Alec remembered his promise to drive her home. Perhaps he would ask Miss Pennithorne, and then she would go in the carriage, or walk. Herbert packed the trap to the last "bobtail," and Alec was wrapping up the ladies; he was attentive to everyone: stowed away his aunt Dodson, who was not at all merry; saw that both the Pennithorne girls sat together; wrapped a rug round Miss Yuke, as the best remedy for fire. "And now," said Alec to Nellie,

"come." That was all. He seemed to take it as his right, and she was happier, far happier, that it should be so. She liked this taking charge of her; and Herbert, from the back seat, took care of her too.

Captain Blundell had announced his intention of walking home, and said a pleasant "Good-night" to all. To Nellie he said, "I have to thank you for more than you are aware of."

XV.

WHEN Nellie got home she found the house very still. The children in bed; nurse had no trouble, but only to lay their heavy heads upon their pillows. Mrs. Dodson was reclining on the sofa, casting-up her accounts of the day's proceedings. Would she find it all outlay? or should she find some corresponding return?

Nellie was stealing away, after a quiet "Good-night."

"I'm going to have a bit of chicken and glass of wine after this stupid day; you had better join me," said Mrs. Dodson. "And when I give any more pic-nics, I'll see and have more gentlemen; it does not do to have only one or two. I see that—I did my best, but I don't think Miss Yuke had one to speak to all day."

"Oh," said Nellie, "I think everyone was pleased; I thought it delightful."

"What a nice creature Captain Blundell is; he promised to introduce me to the Miss Browns, and then," she continued, elevating her chin, "I'll cut Miss Yuke—she's not my style."

After having taken a couple of glasses of wine, and

still feeling low, she had recourse to a little brandy—a “thimble-full.” “Eh, indeed, I don’t think I’ll ever marry again. I couldn’t be bothered with everyone.” And with this oft-repeated assertion, she retired for the night, in sure and certain hope of a visit from a certain nice “creature” on the following day.

But just as she was looking for him, and thinking what she had better say, the captain was sitting with his sister to whom he had fled, after making “urgent business” his excuse to Mr. Brown.

“And now, you dear, good-for-nothing fellow, tell me to what I am indebted for this unexpected visit?”

“Faith, Augusta,” he answered, “tugging at his luckless appendages, ‘I had to ‘cut’ from the tricks of a widow woman, who ‘fancied’ me!’”

“What a fool any woman would be, Tom, who should make you her lord and master!”

“She was no fool, and she had no idea of making me her ‘master;’ it was quite the other way, my pet.”

“Well, I can forgive her, as she is the cause of my seeing you; tell me how long I shall have you?”

“Oh, a day or two, unless I fall into the hands of some other widow,” he answered.

“I shall take care of you,” said his sister, patting him on the back. “Do you ever mean to marry, Tom? Why do you not fall in love and settle?”

“Deuce take it, I am always loving the thing I shouldn’t. I never was so near love in my life as with that little governess thing.”

“What, the widow woman?”

"No, but her governess—a nice little thing. You know, Gusty, she'd make a fellow better."

"Oh," said his sister, laughing heartily. "A governess would never suit you, dear; she'd discover your ignorance, and whip lessons into you."

"She wouldn't have me any way," he answered dolefully.

"You don't mean to say you asked her, Tom?" said his sister more soberly.

"If I do say it, it's a lie," said he, "for she wouldn't let me."

But the next day the captain was on the move again. He walked with his brother-in-law before breakfast, and at that meal he announced his intention of running up to town for a day or two.

"I'll run down soon again," he said. "Young Bennimore's election comes off, and I'll come down with him; he's a nice fellow,—may I bring him here?"

"Certainly," said John Bolton. "I met him, and like him, though I don't intend to vote for him."

Captain Blundell's favourite sister was married to a country gentleman who divided his time between farming, hunting, and sentencing vagrants. He fell in love with Augusta Blundell at a county ball, and she "liked" him, and had no prior fancy; so in due time she came home as mistress of John Bolton's house. She had been married two or three years, and no family, or prospect of one, cheered her future. The house was large and silent. One cannot always keep it full of company, and poor Augusta began to dread the long winter evenings. John read his book, or his

paper, all the evening ; but many a time the tears fell on the embroidery, which the mistress of the house worked at so diligently, fell in the silence, and were brushed away in the silence too. A woman requires duties and responsibilities to keep her heart bright, as well as love, and little pattering feet are sounds sweeter to her ear than any music.

But at the Manor-house no sound of life was heard, after the closing of the windows. Husband and wife sat together, day after day, month after month, both of them wearying for the sound of baby laughter.

The village where Alice lived was on Mr. Bolton's property, and was owned by him. When the news of her goodness reached Mrs. Bolton, she felt that here was work which she might have done, work which she needed, and had left for this stranger. She had wished to call on Alice, but she was told the lady saw no one, wished for no companionship but that of the poor. Then the story of the tramp found its way to Bolton Court, the mother's death, and of the lovely child left to Alice's care. The idea took possession of the young wife's thoughts, and could not be dislodged, that this child, this waif, should be hers, to love and to care for, to lie in her bosom, and be to her as a daughter. How could she obtain it ? This was her thought night and day. She grew pale and thin, and John, who observed more than his wife had an idea of, proposed change.

"Are you ill, Gusty ?" he asked, tenderly. "It grieves me to see you look thin and pale."

"Oh, John !" and bursting into tears, she laid her face on his breast, and wept long and sore.

"Tell me," said her usually phlegmatic and matter-of-fact husband—"tell me, darling, what is wrong?"

"I think everything is wrong," she said, sobbing. "You looked for the house to be peopled with young voices, and instead of that it is dull and silent, and I am miserable."

"I am not miserable," said John, raising her face until it was framed between his two hands. "I have you, and I am happy. We must not repine. He has given us much, though He withholds some things. You are left too much alone; I am often out. Ask your sister or anyone you like to stay with you, and I will——"

She stopped him. "John, I am not rebelling, or repining; only I think if I had something to occupy me all day I should be a brighter companion for you in the evening."

"And what will the darling occupy herself with?" he asked, as if he was addressing a petted child.

"Would you think it right or wrong to adopt a child?" she asked, looking into his face.

"Right or wrong, I shall do anything at present to make you happy."

She kissed him lovingly, telling him how her thoughts turned to the little village orphan; and her husband helped her out of her difficulties.

By-and-by, Alice received a sweet, womanly note asking if she would allow a visit from Mrs. Bolton. It was granted; and the young wife almost forgot her errand in her astonishment at getting inside the cottage, and finding a girl younger than herself, and beautiful as a dream—the good fairy of the village.

The women were drawn together, Mrs. Bolton telling of her life and the longing for something to do ; Alice did not speak of herself, but she gave the little history of her child, who had wound itself strangely round her heart since its mother's death.

"But dearly as I love it," she said, "I feel that I should not be justified in refusing your offer. I shall be doing better for it than ever I could hope to do, and it will do you good."

"I shall love it as my very own," said the warm-hearted woman, throwing her arms round Alice and kissing her. "And will you not let me love you too, and come and see you, and bring baby sometimes ? Oh, dear, I am trembling to get it. Do you think it will stay with me ?"

Alice placed the little Clair in its new mother's arms.

"Such a love of a baby. Oh, I am so lucky to get it ; and it is all through you. Oh, you must let me come and thank you better than this. Oh, my beauty !"

This last remark was addressed to the baby, as she devoured it with kisses ; and Alice stood at the cottage door watching the carriage which bore away her pet lily.

When Mr. Bolton made his appearance at home that day, he found his wife a picture of happy contentment, and he was promised an interview with the new arrival after dinner.

Sitting in his beautiful room, surrounded by every luxury which wealth and good taste could supply, John waited for his wife's step, bearing in this boasted

piece of new furniture. "Ah!" he thought, "if it was only our own!" But he was willing to welcome it, if it kept his wife's face in those happy smiles.

"Now, John, did you ever see such a beauty? Confess, sir, if you ever saw such skin, and such eyes! Take it," she said, laughing at his coy touch. "It is not breakable;" and as he held it she told him its mother's short but touching story. "Poor loving thing, her last words were, 'Make it good,' and indeed I'll try;" and catching it up, to John's dismay, she covered it with kisses, baby all the while gurgling its ideas of things in general.

"It's a charming child, Gusty; but think, love, what sorrow you are preparing for yourself, should anything happen to it. They say babies are very brittle."

It was evident there was a connection in Mr. Bolton's thoughts between babies and "glass, this side up;" nor could he help a glance forward, at his stricken wife, should this little idol be taken from her. He knew her impulsive, loving nature might become her own scourge. But there were chords in his wife's heart he had never touched; she answered him—

"John, I have thought of all and weighed it, more for your sake than my own. Had God given us this little one dear, it would be subject to disease and death. I have taken it, with the responsibility of coming years: if love can shield, it will be safe; for the rest, I trust it to God. Just put your finger here, John; the little roguey will play 'crow' with you;" and his huge, brown finger was slipped into the soft baby palm.

"Now?" interrogated the delighted wife, watching

his face eagerly. "Yes," he answered, with the sound of "hush," as he felt the little fingers twine round his own, and a strange thrill of delight or interest touched his heart. Then baby was put down on the hearth-rug to roll about, and both confessed it was a prettier sight than the cat which made way for it. Still gurgling, it was kissed and handed over to nurse, but it preferred the warmth and light, and did not wish to have a door shut between it and its happiness, and soon the little petted cry came back to the two sitting by the fire.

"Oh John, listen!" said his wife, grasping his arm. He laughed at her enthusiasm.

"Is it to the child's cry?" he said. "The less of that the better."

"It is simply delicious!" and Mr. Bolton called his wife "an enthusiastic little puss!"

XVI.

CAPTAIN BLUNDELL did not return for some days. He was at the election, and now came, bringing his friend with him, who, to the surprise of many, but not to the few who knew Clarence Bennimore well, was returned as member for Leconfield. There were other attorneys besides the Finches, older birds still, who were ready to step forward and warn you of the trap laid underneath your eyes. Men who may be seen with very shiny hats and beautifully bound prayer-books tucked under their arm, walking to church on Sunday with wife and boys. "Most respectable" men, who could bow their bald heads and look the Finches in

the face crying, "I thank Thee I am not even as this man;"—men who could and did give better advice to Mr. Bennimore, which advice sent him to Leconfield with a heavy purse. He called on the whole body of voters, very many of whom, after a confidential talk and warm pressure of the hand, which generally left an "impression" behind it, promised to answer to the suitor's call, though "father and mother, and all went mad." The ladies of the town adored him. He was popular with all classes, quick to turn to each the side which suited. Flirting girls thought him delightful, and each had some special tribute offered on her own shrine, which kept her in a flutter of hopeful uncertainty. He handled the religious element just as dexterously, and attached every little sect to him with an adhesive plaster of "donations."

Mr. Bennimore did not boast of his success in canvassing; it suited his little game better to keep quiet. His new adviser bid him leave all his affairs seemingly in Mr. Finch's hands still. That gentleman's suspicions were not to be roused on any account, if they were to have any success in outwitting him. In due time the colonel appeared on the scene, and the tempting sop held out to Mr. Bennimore in the shape of an invitation from a leading man in the leather trade to stand for Southwark, was calmly put aside; he had his hand on a seat, and no one should take it from him. When fair words failed, they had recourse to bitter; but here Clarence was at home. "Bitter words" had driven a better man than the colonel from his path before. The colonel addressed Leconfield, and charged her with unfaithfulness. He

vowed to die a soldier's death, and never give in; news alike pleasant to all advisers. The siege lasted for a week, at the end of which time Leconfield declared her choice fixed on Mr. Clarence Bennimore, and that gentleman grew hot all over as he thought of the price he had to pay for her preference. But he was not a man to dwell long on the unpleasant. Of course, Finch and he were sworn foes, as often happens with sworn friends.

Exhausted from his efforts at Leconfield, Clarence was quite ready to accompany his friend home. Now that it was all over he was able to think how well it would look in the local papers to announce the arrival of "Clarence Bennimore, Esquire, M.P., at John Berkeley Bolton's, Esquire."

Mrs. Bolton was glad to see both the gentlemen, and took Tom off with her at once to inspect her new prize, leaving the two wise men talking politics. The baby took kindly to Tom, and at once laid hold of those blonde appendages, which seemed made for pulling. He highly approved his sister's conduct, and then confided to her what she always knew he thought, that the place was "deuced dreary without something to play with."

"Tom, is it not a beauty?"

"It's the nicest affair of the kind I ever saw; it's so soft, you know, and fluffy, and the feel of it creeping over you is delicious," he answered. "Leave it with me, Gusty, and sit down here, and tell me all the story; who is this 'good fairy' of the village? The new member was asking me all sorts of questions about her as we drove here. If she's not too old and

ugly, she may be looking out for 'a proposal.' He thinks she would be the 'thing' to keep him popular."

"Tom," said his sister, "Mrs. More is a younger woman than I am, and the loveliest creature I ever saw. She has retired here in consequence of some deep sorrow, and sees no visitors. I cannot have her annoyed. She is a perfect lady, and you must promise to play none of your tricks."

"It's a splendid thing, by Jove!"

The speaker was Mr. Bennimore, who, with the master of the house, had entered unperceived.

"I wonder would it come to me," he continued, holding out his hands, while, with a fascinating smile, he cried, "Come." Baby looked and growled, saying as plainly as her imperfect speech would allow, "keep off," but his conceit blinded him, so, with a step nearer, he lifted her from Tom's arm. She threw herself back, kicked and screamed like a very vixen, and fastened her little fingers round his nose; she was determined to keep him at arm's length. Mr. Bolton, before his wife had time to extricate herself from her low chair, had lifted the squalling child into his arms. The tears were still in baby's blue eyes, but in a second she was crowing with delight, burying her fingers in his wilderness of beard, as she looked in safety from her haven; Mrs. Bolton watching her husband with delight.

"Would you believe it, Bennimore, the child has been an age here, and I never asked its name yet? We call it Lily."

"Kate would suit it better," said Mr. Bennimore;

"it's a bit of a shrew," as he wiped the tiniest drops of blood from his nose with a cambric handkerchief.

"Its poor mother called it Clair, John, but we scarcely think it is baptized.

Captain Blundell was tapping his boot with a cane while his sister was speaking; when she ceased he drawled out—

"Clair, Clara, Clarence; eh, old fellah?" looking up with a smile.

Mr. Bennimore grew white to his very lips, and dropping into his chair, he laughed his very hardest, while the little Clair burst into a passionate flood of tears. It was Mrs. Bolton's province now to take possession of the baby, which was pressed against her face and kissed, while the most foolish words and sentences were addressed to it. At last, stepping through the open window, the mother and child soon cleared up matters between them.

The next time Mrs. Bolton met her guest, he asked her to introduce him at the cottage.

"I have been hearing of this wonderful woman all day long," he said.

"Oh," said Mrs. Bolton, "she is beautiful as an angel, and far better."

He laughed, and told her the reports were really penetrating between the joints of his harness, and he felt eager, while yet the sound of victory was in his ear, to add this brightest laurel to his crown, and stroking his Napoleonic face, he looked at himself in the glass, and smiled.

Mrs. Bolton had no objection that Mr. Bennimore should win this beautiful prize for his own. She fully

agreed with him that he should marry, and of course she knew he would be looked on as an excellent *parti*.

Mrs. More saw no visitors, and Mrs. Bolton told him so, adding she would ask for permission to take him. But his conceit answered her—

“Oh, I’m different; you’ll find she will be delighted, and all that sort of thing.”

A strange thing, meanwhile, had happened in the village. Tib was confined to the house, and she was not ill! The villagers missed her daily going to and from the post-office; and in a small community, little things affect the inhabitants, just as great things in a city, and each individual was eager to recommend their own particular remedy, Mrs. Blair showing the estimation in which she held the little black ball by carrying to her, with her own hand, the book which, with her Bible, constituted her library. The two books lay side by side on a little shelf, both carefully studied; but the precepts of the one were not so carefully or practically carried out as the remedies of “Buchan.” “That’s the man,” Mrs. Blair would say in a burst of enthusiastic admiration, “as opened up yer in’ards.” Tib, however, returned the book unappreciated and unread.

“There’s nothing wrong with me, Mrs. Blair; but if I studied it, I could soon cry ‘here’ to all the maladies under the sun.”

“I think it’s yer stomach,” remarked Mrs. Blair, unabashed. “I’ll give you a couple of my pills, follow them up with a black draff, an’ you’ll soon be another woman, I can tell you.”

"To be another woman," said Tib, "would suit me very well just now ; but I don't believe in pills."

"See that now, if I don't take me pill I can't take me meal ; it seems like, the one makes place for the other," said Mrs. Blair, encouragingly.

"Hunger," snapped Tib, "is the best pill ever anybody had before a meal. If you had more faith in hunger, you'd want less pills."

"Well, now," mused the disciple of Buchan, "soment must be rale wrong when you don't relish your food. Step up to me this evening, and have a bit of dumplin'."

But Tib steadily refused Blair's pills in every shape, and remained indoors the second day. And here the reader has the advantage of Mrs. Blair, and of course knows that so long as Mr. Clarence Bennimore is at the Manor-house, so long must Tib be invisible. Alice could scarcely believe her when she came in telling whom she had seen.

"Are you quite sure, Tib, that it was Mr. Clarence ? Mrs. Bolton told me her brother was coming to her ; you may have been mistaken."

"No, Miss Alice ; I saw him too well for that ; he was driving with Mrs. Bolton."

XVII.

WHEN Alice first came to the cottage, she came, as we know, only for a few weeks or months, until Godfrey came home ; but circumstances, which she could not have foreseen, had shut her in ; and the more she thought over her position, the more she was reconciled to it. She had found work for heart and hand, and she often said to Tib, where could she be happier, while waiting for

the goodness of God? but, above all people, she must keep the secret of her hiding-place from him who first drove her to it. So Tib was kept a close prisoner.

When Mrs. Bolton's note was brought to Alice, she felt both annoyed and perplexed. She knew right well she would be anything but a pleasant sight to Clarence. Did he but guess who it was he was petitioning, he would fly from the place. But she was not strong enough to brave him, and a bad man fits into many frames. After much thought, she decided on trusting Mrs. Bolton with her "views" so far as he was concerned. That lady sat in her private room, thinking over the note she had received in answer to hers.

"The very sound of my name in his ears would make him fly from the place; but he must not hear it, for I fear as well as despise him." The note entered a little more into detail, and ended with, "I must fly from the place if he will not."

Mrs. Bolton was like many women, who do not trust their own instincts unless they pass under an examination of other advisers; also, she was not one to have secrets, though fully capable of keeping one, if necessary. She loved to "take counsel," and when, after much of that, her own opinion was strengthened, she had her little triumph in remarking, "It is just what I thought myself, but I wished to know what you thought of it." She felt the need of some one to advise her now, as she sat on, with the letter still in her hand. She knew Mr. Bennimore would ask what success, for it was not idle talk with him when he said that here, ready to his hand, was the very helpmate for him. He was not slow

to question the villagers, nor were they slow to answer, diminishing nought from her charms, one young woman giving him her own opinion that some day a carriage and eight horses would come for the princess: "Oh! she's that good, when John Walters fell into consumption, sir, she kept the heart in him, the doctor said, with her sweet pity and good wine three full weeks after he was give over; and his large eyes, the doctor said his heart was in them, never shut from watching for her, and she prepared him and comforted him, and he died thanking God for sending His angel to him. Oh, sir, we're as proud of her as if she was the Queen."

Mr. Bennimore had repeated this conversation to Mrs. Bolton, with the comment, "The very wife for a member of Parliament; an incapable one drags an aspiring man back two steps for every one in advance."

Mr. Bolton had driven his friend into Leconfield; his wife felt she must take counsel, if only with Tom; and it was all laid before him, and the lengthening of his beard through his fingers gave some promise of wise thoughts. He recollected the whitening lips of Mr. Bennimore a few days before, and now his sister's news confirmed him that his new friend was not *sans reproche*.

"Give me a little time to think over it, Gusty. I'll tell you the minute I hit on a plan."

Then, by her brother's advice, she wrote at once, assuring Alice of her faithfulness. "You must not fly, whatever happens; we cannot afford to lose you. Be assured your asylum will not be invaded. Trust me."

At breakfast the following morning Mr. Bennimore was gay and pleasant, having resolved with himself to

try his luck that day. He did not believe in "modest" women—he did in "coy" ones—but he knew how to draw them out. The post-bag had been emptied, and nothing called for the new member's presence in town. The captain had not yet returned from his sea-bath—a goodly heap lay upon his plate, amongst them one, imposing in appearance, marked "On Her Majesty's Service."

"Deuce take it," said the captain, fresh and glowing, "I suppose it's my tramp ticket." But no, so he too looked relieved. Presently he turned his attentions from the fried sole to his sister.

"Gusty, you had better keep the Lily close for a few days,—confined to barracks, you know."

"What *do* you mean, Tom?" and Mrs. Bolton's face became pale as death.

"Oh," said the captain, looking anxiously at her, "don't get into a fret—it mayn't be so bad, after all."

"Tom, dear," and she got up, and came to him, "what is it? why should I keep baby in? what is there to fear?"

"Small-pox?"

The little party became grave at once, and well it might, for some years before, this terrible disease had broken out in the neighbourhood, and laid waste the homes of the village. Sanitary meetings had done much, and since Alice had come, more was done out of regard to her good opinion than any committee of management could effect in a lifetime; but Mr. Bolton had himself lost a young and favourite sister, and no wonder if he looked concerned, as he thought of the

new treasure, and how its loss would darken their home.

The silence was broken by Mr. Bolton asking some particulars, after which Mr. Bennimore announced that a sudden call, which he had overlooked, would oblige him to leave immediately. He looked on it as most disgusting just now, as nothing he should like better than standing by his post in the hour of danger. This, however, was the worst of public life; a man belonged to his country, and private feelings, &c. It did not seem to strike Mr. Bolton that this call was sudden, and that a few moments before the new member was merry over his uninterrupted holiday—the greater thought had driven out the lesser. Mrs. Bolton had fled at the first sound of danger to see with her own eyes if dear Lily was indeed safe.

“We shall be very sorry to lose you, Bennimore, but for your own sake I am very glad—this is no place for you.” So spake the master of the house.

The captain was enjoying his breakfast like a soldier. As he poured himself out another cup of coffee, he drawled out,—

“I’m going into Leconfield—aw. Can I drop you at the station? What train *must* you catch?”

“Thanks, Blundell, thanks; I am very sorry to have to leave like this,” and to make it more emphatic, Mr. Bennimore cursed; “but as I must, you know, the sooner the better; really now, I’m awfully mad to go.”

“I believe you, but—aw—duty calls, etcetera,” drawled the captain; “and I like you well enough to be delighted you’re off; your face would not be im-

proved by a 'crop of pock;' clean faces are awfully dirtied."

Mr. Bennimore shivered.

"I've been looking at baby, John; I found a little pimple on the back of her neck. Nurse declares it's nothing. I must have Dempster over at once to see the darling."

"I'll bring him back with me, Gus. I'm going to drive Bennimore to the station. I'll be round with the trap in half-an-hour—look sharp."

"Going away, Mr. Bennimore? I thought you said 'no summons;'" but she had no time to spare on anything but the nursery. Mr. Bolton said good-bye to Mr. Bennimore, and at once set off to make inquiries, though his brother-in-law asked him to await his return. Before the half-hour was up, the captain was sitting on his perch waiting his friend, whom he drove to the station forthwith.

"Good-bye, Blundell, good-bye; I'm awfully mad to go."

"I believe you, but it's for the best; good-bye, Bennimore," and the Newmarket dashed off at a slapping pace.

Mr. Bennimore finding he had half-an-hour to spare, turned into an apothecary's shop, and got himself thoroughly disinfected. "Just come from a house where small-pox has broken out." He was choked with brimstone, but could hardly be got to say he had enough. At last, smelling infernally, he took his seat for London, thankful at the close shave of it which he had had.

When the captain set down his friend, he turned his

horse's head homewards. At the gate he met Mr. Bolton, who was talking to his steward.

"Come back to the house with me, John, I want you."

Both gentlemen found Mrs. Bolton and nurse going over baby again more minutely. John took the little one up again, and Tom called his sister to him.

"Look here, Gusty, I'm in a devil of a scrape, and you must get me out of it."

"You didn't bring Dempster," she said.

"Leave the kitten alone, it's all right. You remember asking me to help you in that affair of Bennimore and the cottage? I saw there was no way of preventing him doing as he wished—honour does not come before self with him. He told me positively that nothing should prevent him from seeing the lady, and hearing his fate from her own lips. I accidentally found out he is a coward. I frightened him for you, and he is gone."

She took it all in at a glance. "There is no small-pox, and I may be easy about the baby. Oh, you dear, clumsy, good fellow!"

"Show John Mrs. More's letter, Gusty." Then turning to the bewildered John, he said: "You know, old fellow, I didn't tell a lie, though, faith, I would, to get rid of the hound."

XVIII.

THOUGH Mr. Bolton felt relieved of a great weight in finding his brother-in-law was only "larking," he still thought it a strange proceeding, and requiring explanations. The captain retired while the "court-martial"

sat on him, after first telling them he looked for promotion for good conduct, and Mrs. Bolton did make it all "straight" with her husband, who laughed at Tom's generalship now that all fear was removed; but Mrs. Bolton would not have Tom laughed at, he acted "nobly," she said. Of course, there was a very long talk between them over the mystery at the cottage, coming to the conclusion that they had nothing to do in unravelling it. Then husband and wife walked off to the village, eager to relieve the anxiety which Alice must suffer.

"The sneaking coward, to think because a woman is alone she must be insulted," said Mr. Bolton, as he sauntered outside waiting for his wife's return.

Alice was moving about among her babies, and her face broke into smiles at the news she heard. When Tib heard that this fear was removed from them, she said—

"God is good; His clouds are showers of mercy."

"My husband would not come in without leave, you see," and she pointed to the patient figure.

"I will not keep you from him," said Alice, and willingly and of herself she pressed a kiss on the pretty cheek of her friend, who went away more charmed than ever.

Tib resumed her interrupted duties once more, and Alice was forced to consent to occasional drives in Mrs. Bolton's pony carriage; and in the beautiful spring time, after her babies were all carried home, Tib paid visits too, pleased to see her dear lady looking bright and happy.

One evening Mrs. Bolton carried Alice off to pay a

visit to baby. Great was the sound of crowing as they neared the nursery. On entering the captain was discovered galloping round the room (on all-fours), the bright, pretty little girl set well on his shoulders, and urging him on with crows of delight. There was nothing blonde about him but his long, drooping beard—his face was like a peony, as he jumped to his feet and stood still panting for breath. Alice admired him, and could not help thinking what a powerful auxiliary he would prove to Tib at times. He had his reward, by being permitted to look on the most beautiful face he ever saw in his life; but he knew, while he looked, that he could never be more to the woman before him than friend. There was a something about her, a "halo," as he said afterwards to his sister, which made her sacred in his eyes, and when she gave him her hand at parting he could have raised it to his lips, but that he feared to offend.

"Will you look on me as a friend?" he asked, pleadingly; "and if ever you want a service done, command me."

"I will, indeed," she said, simply.

When Alice required a supply of money she usually sent Tib on a visit to the Clewbend, but Mr. Bennimore's presence made her nervous of being left alone, and she had been thinking that her new friend might be her medium in this instance. Under cover to Tib her cousin Mary could send her the package, if Captain Blundell would undertake the charge of it.

Miss Norton always managed her money matters for her with her old friend Mr. Monteith. He believed in her cousin Mary to the extent of "absurdity,"

Alec said. Mr. Monteith was Alice Harvey's man of business; he was a little, keen, shrivelled man of parchment, honest and faithful. He, of course, was not careless at the time of the investigation into the strange occurrence, but while listening to Alec and Miss Norton's evidence, the little man shrewdly guessed part of the truth, and the first time Miss Norton applied to him for money she strove to explain, and then, fearing she had been too transparent, she struck off into the mysterious. He laughed a thin, crackling splutter, just like crumpled parchment, as he said—

"I'll give the money, and ask no questions: can anything be fairer than that, Miss Mary? only don't try to throw dust in my old eyes."

Mary, laughing, promised never to do so again. This was the third time he had given a large sum without knowing what it was for, or getting any better security than "It is all right, Mr. Monteith."

"I'm sure it is, Miss Mary, I'm sure it is," was his answer.

She had the crisp bank notes made up in a packet addressed to Tib—inside lay the long letter to her dear cousin Alice. There was not much to tell, but she had not been idle, looking every day at that wondrous column of the *Times*' first sheet, to see if any answer came to her ingeniously-contrived messages, but no sign ever met her eye, though more than once she had changed some word, or more plainly referred to what had taken place, and in her heart she was less hopeful of being the means of bringing two loving natures together than she wished to show. She loved her cousin dearly, and little guessed to what train of

circumstances and deceit that parting in the little room at Leconfield had given rise.

Our actions would be weighed with greater care if we could know the result which was to follow each, but we are blind doers oftentimes, of great and good, as of bad and miserable deeds. If either of them could have foreseen the events which followed, far differently would they have acted; and Mary Norton, while blaming herself deeply for not being wiser and stronger and better than she was or could be, still held loyally to her cousin's secret, not knowing, indeed, what benefit could arise from opening up the springs of gossip again. They were completely dried up, and surely it was better to leave them so, but she was a sadder girl for the twelve months' experience and trouble. Had she her cousin's ear, she probably would have persuaded her ere this to a different line of action, but communication by letter was a most unsatisfactory mode of exchanging thought, and besides, Alice had grown to like the life which had sprung to her from her sorrow. Had she remained at the Clewbend, petted and sympathized with by a loving household, she might have become a selfish sufferer, enlisting everyone in her service by her grief. She would have grown into the habit, probably, of spending most of her days reclining on a sofa as the proper position for a "suffering angel." The best fortune which ever befell her was that which threw work in her way, and gave her the desire to do it. She was of use in the world, and no one hearing her pleasant laugh as she led her babies in some little game, could imagine that she knew grief, or wondered at times why her heart did

not break. For the last two or three months she had been busier than ever. She took it into her head that she must contrive something additional in the way of help. She found there was no school in the village, a long walk over hill and dale led to the nearest school-house, but it overtaxed the strength of the young and delicate, and many parents could not spare the time which their children required.

She thought of giving up the only sitting-room she possessed, but Tib stood firm, and would not consent, so cousin Mary was commissioned to get the needful money for building a school-room adjoining the cottage. It would take very little, the merest trifle, to a rich man, but a goodly sum in the eyes of these simple villagers. Plans and estimates strewed Alice's breakfast-table, not more than half of them looked at before the babies' arrival. She would hastily lay them aside till the evening, smiling to herself at being "so busy;" and when the last toddling "wee" thing had said its "dood-bye," all the laid-aside treasures were drawn forth, Tib gladly helping by drawing the little table into the window, where the very latest ray of light was sure to fall. This evening Alice must choose between the plan of young Mr. Simmons, who was a villager's son, and of course, for that reason, a favourite, and the plan of a Leconfield builder.

Mr. Simmons seemed to comprehend at once what the lady wanted; his plan was very pretty, and consisted in building a Gothic porch to the present dwelling, giving ample room to accommodate the number of children, and when not required as a school-room, it served as a handsome entrance hall. The other plan

was simpler, and was merely the addition of a room to the cottage, and a room over it for the teacher. Alice inclined to Mr. Simmons' plan, though considerably more expensive, as the present building would require some alterations to bring it into harmony with the new design. She explained, pencil in hand, to Tib, the drawings of both plans, and was so pleased to find that little woman quite of her own way of thinking as to architecture.

"I just hate flat ceilings, Miss Alice, and I don't know why grand folk ever have them, I'm sure."

"Then it's decided," said Alice, "we shan't have flat ceilings, and I shall accept Mr. Simmons' plan."

The young architect, who had his fame to make, felt very grateful for the good lady's preference, and Alice was more pleased still, for Mr. Bolton, hearing from his wife that she was about to build, had at once expressed a wish to help her, and talking over matters with Mr. Simmons, whose father was land steward on his estate, he offered to supply all materials. So that when Alice sent for the young man, she found instead of having chosen the highest, she had indeed, as things turned out, chosen the least expensive.

It was about this time that she asked Mrs. Bolton if her brother would take charge of a packet from her companion to the young lady at the Clewbend.

"It will be anything but a trouble to Tom," said her friend, laughing; "the only doubt I have is, if I tell him it is from your own hand, that he will never part with it, but keep it as a relic of 'one of God's angels.' I do believe he worships you."

Alice laughed.

"Tell him," she said, "that it is Tib's, which I merely direct; he must promise to give it into the hands of Miss Norton herself, from whom he will receive a return packet; if Tib is any judge of beauty, I think your brother will see a fairer face than mine."

"And Tom will be wounded again while yet unhealed. The comfort is those wounds don't kill," said Mrs. Bolton.

XIX.

RIDING slowly at the end of a summer's day—a long day's journey—Captain Blundell found himself nearing Hacklebury. He rode through the half-deserted streets, past Mrs. Dodson's green door, not without thinking of the pretty, modest girl who had so cleverly been too much for him, and in his heart, he wished some equally good and pretty woman would take a fancy to him. He began to think that might turn out more successfully. He rode on, and was welcomed by the Miss Browns with gushing fervour. They wanted him for so many things—croquet, archery, and no end of amusements.

On retiring for the night, Tom laid the packet on the dressing-table, thinking of her from whose hand his sister had placed it in his. He looked at the superscription—a pretty, feminine hand traced the letters; he could swear it was the mistress, not the maid, who wrote that N so free and pretty, joining on to the o, with ease and grace. He stood by the table following each letter thus, and he came to the conclusion that the writer was a capital hand at drawing-

He thought of the sweet, sad face which had gone farther into the young man's heart than was good for him. He stood, still holding the little snowy packet, but it would have been wiser for him to be in bed, for he was dreaming of all he had lost by not being first in a good woman's love. Would she listen to him? give him ever so faint a hope to be the sunrise of his future? He could wait a year, two years, if she bid him wait in hope. He turned his eyes on the "hand" he held—ay, surely he is dreaming—and giving it a gentle respectful pressure, he raised it to his lips, and impressed a fervid kiss upon it. He was not dreaming now; he had wakened, and with a pshaw! threw down the billet, which had done duty as his lady's beautiful hand, threw it down, and laughed, and coloured at being detected—by himself. He went to bed, and dreamed of Miss Norton.

The morning sun shone bright and clear as he passed along to execute his commission, wondering if the lady of his dream was tall or short, dark or fair. The young squire was the only Norton he knew, and Alec was a good-looking fellow. Just as he was approaching the hall door, which stood hospitably open to admit the morning, a lady drew near from a garden-path. She had on a white morning dress, and her dark hair was coiled round a shapely head; in one hand she held a basket of freshly-cut flowers, and in the other, laid on a vine leaf, were two splendid peaches.

The captain saw her, and admitted to himself, if she was indeed Miss Norton, he was "done;" he nibbled nervously at his beard, as he thought of the

inevitable meeting on the door-step. But a woman is far quicker at taking in surroundings than the "nobler" sex, and seeing, as she supposed, one of Alec's friends, she admitted herself to the house through the conservatory, and when the captain turned to meet his fate, with a made-up look on his face, lo ! she had vanished. "Faith, I shouldn't wonder if she's a vision," he thought, as he pulled the bell; but in a few seconds he stood face to face with the "vision," and had nearly made an ass of himself in her eyes.

He was shown into a pretty morning-room with open windows, round which peeped and clung showers and clusters of roses. He had his usual occupation in hand, when noiselessly, it seemed to him, the "vision" stood before him. He started, dropped his hat from his unoccupied hand, felt inclined to stoop and pick up his property, but recovered time enough to know he was a fool. Miss Norton was good natured as well as pretty, and somehow the packet made peace between them—after its delivery, they got along as old friends.

"Oh, Captain Blundell, do tell me, what is Mrs. More like? Tib writes of her in such a way; and even here, one listens to nothing but praises of her, and all she is doing for the village."

"I have only seen Mrs. More once, but with one or two little differences, you are very like her, Miss Norton," said the captain, not knowing, perhaps, that he had not answered the question put to him.

"How strange," said the lady, colouring; "Tib, who is an old friend of mine, never remarked the likeness."

Miss Norton felt she had made a foolish remark; it was the same as impeaching the captain's opinion, and in a manner challenging him to look again, and he of course, like the soldier he was, accepted the challenge raising his clear, blue eyes to the face before him with such a criticising air, that she could not resist laughing, and she laughed so pleasantly, that he could not resist joining her, and the two young people were no longer strangers.

After arranging the time of calling for the return packet, he walked away with his heart in his eyes,—blind as an owl. He turned into the Clewbend woods to reflect on his morning's work, and recall the face which had so blinded him; sitting down on the trunk of a tree, he began dreaming. He would give much to know if Miss Norton had an "*affaire du cœur*," and he would give double that to know what she thought of him—heigho! He smiled to himself as he mentally ran his eye along a list of pretty women, any one of whom would have made him happy by becoming his, but they didn't. And he was here still, to be captivated anew. One might have guessed it was the beauty of the day which tempted him to sit on in the wood, but he was perfectly oblivious as to his surroundings; he was looking over love's plans for an airy castle!

Coming along this very wood-path, on her way to the Clewbend, was Mrs. Dodson, her stout figure borne along by a pair of dainty feet, tripping almost as lightly as sweet sixteen. She had changed her weeds to flowers, and seeing the figure seated on the very ree where he had placed her that memorable evening

to relieve her pain, her eye lightened, her step grew more elastic, and her heart went out to him—she always thought he would come back, and the dear fellah! here he was. Ah, well, it was really affecting to see him!

“Good-morning, captain,” brought that gentleman to his feet in a manner which fastened the conviction on Mrs. Dodson’s mind that he was “low” about her, and was cherishing a secret affection. “Poor fellah!” she again mentally repeated, “I’ll not be hard on *that*.”

Very politely indeed was her salutation returned, until the captain remembered that the lady before him was aunt to the lady of his dreams, and relatives often require more “courting” than the wife, so he became the Captain Blundell of *her* dreams. She felt she was right; he just required a little help, and she knew how to treat men.

“Turn with me a little bit, I’m going to the house. Well, captain, where have you been since *that* night, and why didn’t you come back sooner?” she exclaimed, with fervour, as he obeyed her.

“I have been in London part of the time, and with my sister.”

“I’m thinking of going there myself.”

“What? to London?” he asked, not very sure but that she might have meant his sister.

“Yes, why not? I’m going to throw up my house here; I’m tired of it now.”

Captain Blundell expressed himself neither glad nor sorry at this news, he was quite indifferent as to where

the lady struck her tent, but he again remembered the relationship.

"London is a charming place," he said, "for anyone with money enough to buy its charms."

"What's the use of a woman burying herself in an out-of-the-way place like this when she's well off—now while I'm fresh and young, anyway?"

The captain viciously bit at his blonde side-lengths while answering—

"You will like London, I think."

"So everyone tells me, and I may as well make the change now, in the best of my days. I have no idea, I can tell you, of giving up life *yet*." The last word so emphasized as to make the captain feel guilty, so he strove to change the subject, but did not succeed, for Mrs. Dodson was like a top, with self as its centre, and round this she spun her life away.

"How are your boys?" he asked; "the eldest is a fine lad."

"I wish you had them to manage," she answered, with a light laugh, "and maybe you wouldn't praise Herbert then. I can tell you I have to threaten him sometimes."

"Indeed!" and the captain raised his well-shaped eyebrows.

"I just told him yesterday that if he didn't obey me, I'd bring some man into the house that would make him."

"Man?" asked the captain.

The widow turned round and looked at him; her face was flushed with talking, but it had a look of merriment quite irresistible, supposing her companion

inclined to be jolly, but he was not. She looked him all over; then in answer to his "man?" she said most emphatically, and lengthening out the first vowel in the word—

"A father, and he shakes in his shoes at fear of my doing it," and she laughed hilariously.

Most thankfully her companion caught sight of Alec, who was leaving the hall door in his trap. The captain raised his hat to the widow, and whistling to the charioteer, he was soon bowling away to the town, feeling free once more to nibble and dream at will.

Alec was surprised to find him a "nice fellow" instead of a "snob," but the last time they met the captain was not head over heels in love with Alec's sister. Before they parted the young squire invited him to dinner at the Clewbend the following day. Meanwhile Miss Norton had received her aunt in the same room from which the captain had not long gone. She saw him approach the house with her, and wondered at his second visit, but before reaching the terrace he had bowed and disappeared.

"What do you think of me, walking through the woods with a young man and an officer, my dear?" This was the widow's morning salutation, and everyone knew that to be a man at all was much in her eyes, but a "man and an officer!" this, indeed, was perfection. She believed that a red coat covered a multitude of sins in more than one sense. Few understood the "dear fellahs" as well as she did; she was accustomed to their society and their admiration; her family had been all officers—she would not say soldiers lest she might be misunderstood, not one belonging to her ever was a

soldier—oh, dear, no! they were the “first people” in Tullydiddler. Pleased and happy she met Miss Norton.

“You look charming, aunt; your walk and companion must have been agreeable.”

“I’m a great walker, you know, Mary, and I never saw the poor fellah till I was on him. He was sitting where he and I sat the day of Herbert’s pic-nic. I’m awfully sorry I didn’t bring him in and introduce him. He’d do anything I bid him.”

“Happy woman!” laughed Mary, saucily.

Mrs. Dodson drew herself up to her full height.

“I don’t look badly, eh? Mr. Weston asked me yesterday if Herbert was my brother; he couldn’t believe, he said, that I was mother to that great boy.”

“Very nice of Mr. Weston,” remarked Mary, sedately.

“Well, dear, I’m getting a new dress made by Miss Smith. I hear she makes for the Miss Browns. She’s awfully dear, but then—tip-top, you know.”

Miss Norton smiled, and hoped it would fit. “How is it to be made, aunt?”

“When I’m paying high, I may as well get all she can put on it, so she’s to put all the ‘fillamejigs and panyers,’ you know, that’s worn.”

“What a trouble our dress is, to be sure,” remarked Mary; “men have the best of it there.”

“Gentlemen like to see us nicely dressed, my dear. What do you think Ann told me of that doctor that has come next door?”

“I don’t know, I’m sure.”

“That he watches me going out every Sunday because I dress so nicely; and last Sunday he added,

that that young widow had a *lovely* ankle. You remember, it was windy." And Mrs. Dodson's laugh was as satisfactory to herself as a young cock's crow. With women she had just two topics of conversation, "dress" and "servants."

Alec came in before she left, and when she heard that Captain Blundell was coming to dine the following day, she expressed her belief that the "poor fellah" expected to meet her, but as her sister-in-law was not very friendly, invitations to the Clewbend had become very rare.

"He'll expect to meet me here," she said, "but I'll write and ask him to my own house. I'd invite you to meet him, but he wants to talk on private business."

"All right," said Alec; "the evening after will do me as well, and you'll be dull."

"Very well, then, come and hear my news on Thursday evening."

Alec walked home with his aunt; he always did, and seemed very affectionate towards her.

"That will do, Alec; you needn't come any further to-day."

"Oh, I'll go to the house," he answered carelessly; "I want to get my fly-book from Herbert."

XX.

HERBERT was in the school-room, and thither the young squire sauntered. To his modest knock the sweetest voice in all the world to him answered, "Come in." If he had not knocked, all would have gone well with him, but while waiting, his heart began

to beat and his blood to mount, and as usual, when the door opened, it displayed a tall, loosely-hung young giant, with a face as red as a milkmaid's, and his honest eyes telling ever the self-same thing. What always happened of course happened again. Nellie's eyes were raised to the door, when she said "Come in;" then she said to the boys, "Who is it, I wonder?" and they answered, "Cousin Alec, I hope;" and she sat watching and waiting to see, and the moment she did see, she dropped her eyes on her work, and her face flushed up, red as his own. This colouring up and looking down process had been going on for months. Nellie had been growing dearer to Alec every day, but she resisted his entrance into her heart. She knew how it would be; she, a poor governess, was no mistress to take to the Clewbend, and she would rather keep her heart tenanted as it was all her life, than be the cause of unpleasantness to one so good and kind as young Mr. Norton. Before many months she had an opportunity of disposing of her heart and hand, and so putting an end to Alec's temptation.

Mr. Weston met her once or twice when visiting at Mrs. Dodson's, and he longed to have her pure soul in his keeping. She was frail, and would need a strong hand to hold by. The second time the vicar met her, he fell in love with her; and the third time they met, he proposed to her. He knew her well, he said; but Nellie had not been equally quick, and did not know him at all, and, besides, she did not want to know him, and did not at all like him. She could not bear being stared at, and Mr. Weston seldom removed his eyes from her face, no matter when she met him. It may

have been his way, but she did not like it. He had talked for a long time before she knew what he meant, and when she did, she was not long in giving him his answer.

"Dear me," he was not at all prepared for a refusal. Was she "quite sure" she "understood" him? And when she fully satisfied him on this point, he then requested to know her reasons, which she very discreetly withheld.

"Do you love any one else?" he asked, quite suddenly, and as suddenly she answered, "No." He left her, after begging that this matter should have her "prayerful attention." She stood where he had left her, carefully, if not prayerfully, considering a something which this proposal brought to light. She had told a lie to Mr. Weston—that "no" was an untruth, though when her lips moved to utter it, she was unconscious of its falseness. Yes, someone had stolen away her heart—stolen it secretly out of her bosom. Someone whom she found she loved, and she ought not, and yet, when that rude man came and asked for her love, she could have jumped for joy that it was not hers to give.

And at this very hour, when she stood there guiltily and happily confessing her sin, thanking God that the secret was hers alone to guard and keep, at this same hour Alec and his sister are alone in the morning-room at the Clewbend.

"I met Neville the other day, Mary; why does he never come here now?"

"You met him, and ask me a question he could answer better?"

"Ha, ha!—caught, my lady," said Alec. "For I did ask him, and he said you could tell the reason. Collusion, evidently."

Mary did look "caught," but she laughed.

"I suppose he'd come if he liked to come."

"Out again," said her brother saucily, "for he said he only wished he could."

"I am sure I shan't prevent him, Alec."

"Shall I give him that message?"

"At your peril, sir," and she took his big, curly head between her hands, and made believe to throw it like a cricket ball, from one to the other.

After a while he asked,—

"Does my father know that you refused him?"

"No, nor my brother either, wise as he thinks himself."

Jumping up, and sticking his hands deep into his pockets, and squaring himself before her as she sat, he said,—

"I know you refused him, for he told me so."

"Really!" was all the reply he got.

"I suppose I must be married sometime?"

The tone was so lugubrious and prophetic, that his sister could not help laughing, while she asked him in confidence if he had refused anyone yet; but he only looked serious, and sighed deeply as his sister examined him keenly.

"Alec, sit down and tell me; I hope it is nothing my father will disapprove of."

"My mother is more likely; but, Mary, I know you'll like her."

"Do I know her? of course I shall like her."

"You may have seen her, but I'm not sure. I never thought I cared more for her than 'liking' till I heard Weston was going to ask her to marry him."

"And then," said Mary, "you went in first and won."

"Not a bit of it; if she takes him, let her, but she won't; I'd trust her to the death. She's one in a thousand," said he, colouring up like a girl, "though she's not a woman at all yet."

Mary kissed him, this big, honest, loving fellow who never had been anything but a comfort to her.

"You deserve to be happy; tell me who she is, and I shall listen with more pleasure."

"I'd rather go on telling you what she is, for I'm afraid you'll not like who she is."

"And for that reason, who she is, interests me more just now; tell me, Alec?"

"I declare," he said nervously, "I'm modest when I go to name her; by Jove, my heart throbs, and my head whizzes like fun," said the young man, more given to slang than sentiment. "Did you ever feel so, Mary?"

"No, Alec, for I have never been in love; but I can understand it."

"Well, you see," he said coaxingly, putting one hand round her waist, while the other drew one of hers to his beating heart, "it is Nellie Harcourt, Aunt Dodson's governess."

And having fired his shot, he waited for the effect. But with Mary there was no explosion, for her brother was fully capable of choosing and pleasing himself in

her eyes, though she guessed he would not find his cup without the drop of bitterness.

"I have not seen her, Alec, but I had an idea from aunt that she was a plain, sensible, middle-aged person, who was 'strict' with the boys." Alec laughed.

"Oh," he said, "I did hear the 'stunner,'" which disrespectful appellative designated his aunt, "talk of Miss Harcourt and herself as 'we young things;' but, Mary, there's not a better girl in all the world. As for the beauty, you can judge of that yourself; it is not all to be *seen*, remember."

"I seldom go there," said Mary; "when I do, I am bored with tales of sons and servants. I never see either the governess or the boys. I know Herbert loves her, but a little kindness would go a long way with those poor starved children. I do hope you will be happy, Alec."

"Well, Mary, you'll stand by me, but first see her; she knows nothing of what I think of her. All the boys love her. Herbert told me the other day, only for her teaching, they'd strike their mother. 'I've no respect for her,' he said, 'but I have for myself.'"

Mary was eager to see Nellie, and judge of the future mistress of this luxurious home. She knew her father was in no way troubled about pedigree, though he could boast a long and ancient line. Nobility of conduct he held to be above mere blood, and to his son he often said, "Better choose an educated, cultivated 'inferior' by mere birth, than one of those vulgar, 'I can do as I like' class, who have no topic on which to discourse but self; they carry it as their show baby, thrust it in your face, and pat it on the

back on all suitable and unsuitable occasions." But Mrs. Norton made up for her husband's laxness of principles—blood was her sheet-anchor—in her own case it had run through so many generations, that it was double refined or "cold drawn." She boasted of a title in her family, too, not so remote but that she felt the sap rising in herself as a graft on the same old tree. She was above her husband's irony, for books were dear to her, *but* books and brains without blood was "shocking,"—the ladder of the lowly 'tis true. She looked high for her children, and believed they inherited a wonderful talisman from her in the Dodson blood. Alec must marry above himself in birth. All men should, was her rather "odd" belief.

It was very hard to move her from her position; talk as you would, and bring unerring arguments to bear on your point, which must have moved her on a good way, as you think, the next time you approach the subject, you will find she has moved back to the old ground. Her mind was capable of an advance, like a band of india-rubber, but the moment your effort ceases, it falls back to the old groove. Mrs. Norton's ideas were often enough aired in the household, and Alec, peace-loving and dutiful, was not very hopeful of winning his mother's approving smile. She regarded Miss Pennithorne as his future wife—"laid aside" for him until such time as his parents saw fit.

"If my mother knew Nellie, she couldn't help loving her," said Alec the lover.

"But, my dear boy, mother *wouldn't* know Aunt Dodson's governess—the poor woman is bad enough herself, but a servant of hers!"

A groan from Alec was all the answer to this, and she went out leaving him with his face buried in his hands.

Mary knew that Nellie and the boys came to the wood after their tea and before her dinner. She wished to see her "at home," as it were, without any of the awkwardness attending a ceremonious introduction. It was with no little trepidation she sought the river-side. Sounds of merry laughter led her on, and the group she sought suddenly broke upon her sight; gliding behind a pompous old oak, Miss Norton gazed at her future sister-in-law.

She was seated at the foot of a tree, her hat lay beside her, while Herbert read from a book. She was working busily while the three younger boys lay close by, but Mary noticed that each little head was pillowed on some part or other of the governess. Herbert's book was amusing, for he was repeatedly interrupted by the merry laugh of the idlers, Nellie's pure tones rising like silver music with the rest. Her fair hair was pushed back from a pale, clear brow, and when she looked up, a woman's face met Miss Norton's gaze—a woman's face on a child's figure, and as she looked, she wondered at her brother having ever come to see its beauty, and appreciate it, for many an eye might look and turn away. There was a look of meek modesty and grace about the whole figure which charmed Mary, and when little Bricky scrambled to his feet, put his arms round her neck, and kissed and hugged her, Mary felt she could not blame her brother if he was tempted into a desire to do the same. Mary came from her hiding, and in a minute more the two

girls were sitting together. The little ones danced like Indians with delight, Herbert welcoming "cousin Mary" with all the ease of a man at home. The usual topics were discussed between them—work, books, music—and Mary invited Nellie to visit her, which invitation Nellie thought fit to decline.

"If you won't come to me, I shall come to you here in the woods," said Mary; and the boys laughed at the idea of visiting without a door to knock or ring at. Whether it was from sympathy with her brother's tastes and desires, Mary felt so drawn towards the young girl, that while pressing her hand at parting, she could have kissed the fair round cheek; but, as she said to Alec, she thought it wiser to restrain herself.

"Isn't she a dear little thing?" said Alec, brightening.

"I had no idea, Alec, you had such good taste."

"Ha, ha!" he laughed. "You didn't think I'd know a good article when I saw it. I only wish I was a clerk at Epps', and I'd invest in her forthwith; but I must rub myself down for dinner."

XXI.

CAPTAIN BLUNDELL was in no amiable mood as he dressed for dinner at the Clewbend. He wished everything to be faultless, and we all know our luck at such times. Everything went wrong with him—his coat suddenly grew old fashioned and shabby in a single night, like some sorrow-stricken head; his hair had a vicious trick of looking all the worse the more it was

meddled with. The only thing in which he could delight—for it never failed him—were his drooping blonde appendages, which he gently stroked, as he looked his last “critical” look at himself in the glass.

The squire was glad to see his son’s friend, and Mrs. Norton made no greater mistake than addressing him as Captain Blunder. The young fellow would not let her be put right. “Deaf people don’t like it,” he said, “and, besides, Miss Norton knows I am a blunderer, if not a blunder; every time Mrs. Norton calls me so, it reminds me of the happiest moment of my life,” and he dropped his voice for her ear alone. What would he not have given to know that at that moment she was thinking how handsome he was, despite his blue eyes and Saxon hair! Mrs. Norton and he got on very well; she had a capital memory for some things; she remembered being at a ball—her first ball—with his mother, and this supplied dinner-talk, and drew some reminiscences from the old squire.

It was late at night when he took the little packet from Miss Norton’s hand, and promising to deliver it faithfully, took his leave. He felt—shabby coat and vicious hair notwithstanding—that he had left a favourable impression behind him.

Mrs. Dodson sat down and wrote a note to the captain, number two in order, but number twelve in ardour.

Nellie was in the drawing-room when Mrs. Dodson sat down to her davenport.

“Well, dear,” she said, “say what you like, it is nice to be loved.”

Nellie laughed.

"I never said it was not, Mrs. Dodson. I love to be loved."

"Well, you see, it's different in my case; here am I, alone in the world, and I don't think I'd be doing my duty if I bid that poor fellah leave me—he's awfully spooney upon me. I don't know how it is gentlemen are so taken with me. Would you believe it, my poor husband threatened to drown himself if I refused him."

This last remark came as a sort of parenthesis, as though she would say, "Well, I'll not drive a second to *that*."

Nellie did not like to ask who the poor fellah was; she had heard some things from the boys, amongst others that Snooks had begun to appear at supper again, and she never doubted this was the spooney individual, so she answered according to her light.

"Eh, dear!" said the widow; "to think for a moment 'twas him; *he's* very well in his way, but he's not *my* style. Nothing so mean as *that*, I can tell you."

Nellie was horrified at her clumsiness, and preferred ignorance as to all those "allusions."

Mrs. Dodson began her note, too modest, perhaps, to name his name, who was so "spooney;" and yet, not wishing to leave the governess in total darkness, she rang for a servant, to whom she entrusted her missive, with directions that it was to be taken to Mr. Brown's, and an answer waited for.

Nellie knew now, and she did not laugh; she felt the hot blood of shame mounting to her cheeks; she was sorry for the poor woman, and if she could have

prevented it, that letter would never have reached its destination; but she dared not offer advice or counsel, and with a sigh she saw it depart. An hour later, as she was crossing the hall, on her way to the school-room, the same servant and the same letter appeared with the verbal answer that Captain Blundell had left. A blazing face and a slammed door was the result of this information on Mrs. Dodson.

"Alexander, do you not think Alec ought to be settling?" said Mrs. Norton to her husband, as they both sat over the fire in her dressing-room.

Mrs. Norton's affliction prevented her from having many confidential chats, as the squire roared even louder than was necessary in answer to her.

"He is thinking of it, I daresay," he answered.

"I don't see what he's waiting for," she continued; "it's hard on Emily Pennithorne."

"I don't think Alec wants her to wait," said the squire, with a smile; but Mrs. Norton was not to be smiled out of what she had to say.

"It's an understood thing, and I hope he'll never act dishonourably," she said.

"I never intend settling Alec's affairs for him, Ann. I meddled once, unfortunately, and got, not only my fingers but my heart burned. These sort of things require only two people to settle them."

"If you don't meddle, I must," said the little woman, briskly. "I'll ask Emily to the house, and Alec must speak out."

"Do you think he ever gave her cause to expect he'd speak out, Ann?"

"He may not, but I did, and I must see he does

what's right by her. I declare, Alexander, I don't think you'd mind who he married!"

"Not much," answered the incorrigible old man, "so that he pleases himself, and does not disgrace the old name."

"If he doesn't marry Emily he'll do that; there's not another girl in the place fit for him."

"Ay, a dozen, Ann; a man need not be particular as to his wife being just in his own rank—any lady of purity and modesty is fit for any man."

"I'm sure if I were not here, I do not know what would become of the family. There's Mary taken up with a servant, and employs that nice Captain Blunder to carry messages to her; and now if Alec chooses to fall in love with some 'low' person, you'd say nothing but hope he'd be happy."

"And whoever makes him happy is the proper wife for him; and I hope he'll find her—Come to bed, Ann, and don't worry over the young folks."

But she would worry; the wheel of her machinery was set in motion, and her words fell from it—drip, drip, drip—"low" tastes, and her life spent in trying to raise them; and keep the family up.

The squire took his candle and trotted off to bed.

The next morning Mrs. Norton announced her intention of driving over to the Grange, and bringing Emily back with her.

Mary expressed her pleasure; Alec coloured up like a girl and said nothing.

The two gentlemen walked out of the room together, and, arm-in-arm, took the way to the Upper Home Farm. As Alec passed out, his sister whispered "Tell

him ;" and some hours after, seeing them both approach the house again, laughing merrily, her father leaning on Alec's arm, she laid in wait for him to hear the report.

" Well, Alec, is it over ?"

" Yes, Mary, I've told my father, and he's a brick—spoke so nicely, you know, and all that sort of thing. He will call at Mrs. Dodson's to-day and see her. Oh, Mary, the poor little dove will be fluttered ; but I am glad the governor is going to look the little lot over."

" Little lot !" said his sister. " I wish she heard you."

" Well," said slangy Alec, " as she's a governess I suppose I must be careful of my parts of speech."

The " little lot," who was dearer to Alec than he was perhaps aware of, had just left the boys looking up their lessons, and this hour, as the morning room was usually empty, Nellie spent in letter-writing. Here she was installed on this particular morning, and hearing the door open, she guessed, as usual, that little Brickly had followed her steps ; and knowing, from experience, that if she looked up she was lost, she kept her head diligently bent as her fingers traced the rapid lines. Wondering at his silence, for the little scrap soon made himself heard, she glanced round, to find a kind-looking old gentleman apparently waiting her leisure. She crimsoned up—and the foolish little heart leaped to her throat—as she recognised in her visitor the old squire of the Clewbend. Had he come to scold her ? but, no, no one knew her secret.

" I shall go and tell Mrs. Dodson," she said, after first, in some sort of way, having apologised for her pre-occupation.

" No, my dear," he said ; " I made my own way in

here, and if you will forgive the interruption, you will sit down and entertain the old man yourself."

And they sat together talking pleasantly.

"What strange creatures we are," said the squire. "Some one says we each have two attendant angels—I wonder if one is named 'Memory'?"

"I wonder," said Nellie, too shy to give an opinion, although she had one on that very subject.

"As I sat here silent," said the old man, "memory unwound from my life well nigh thirty years, and showed me a girl, just your height, your hair, your eyes, and when you turned to speak, it was with the tones of her voice; but I look at myself in the glass and I see grey hair and old age; but for that I should feel I was once more in the presence of Eleanor Woodville. I could understand it if you were looking at me from the wall; but now," he added, "I am but the sport of memory."

"You will understand it all," said Nellie, with emotion, "when I tell you I am the child of Eleanor Woodville."

"You, the child of Eleanor!" he exclaimed, hastily, and Nellie saw his face strangely moved.

Then she sat by him and told her mother's and her own little story.

"To think," said the squire, "that she was living so near me and my heart not know it." After a while he said, "It was as well, perhaps." Then standing up, he held Nellie's hand in his and looked, not at her, she knew instinctively, but at the faded memory of his life; and afterwards she wove from it a little romance of her dear dead mother.

"Good-bye now, Eleanor," he said, with the far-away look still on his face and in his eyes. "Remember, your mother's child must be dear to me." And the old man went away, and Nellie ran off to teach Latin, but all through the day she felt drawn more and more to the dear dead mother. There was something now knitting them closer together despite death and the grave, and the tears were more than once kissed away by little Brick.

She was not sorry for this little chance meeting with Alec's father, never dreaming it was more than chance, though she was fast schooling herself to look on Alec as Miss Pennithorne's property, for Mrs. Dodson kept her "posted" on any little bit of news, such as that she published at breakfast. "Emily Pennithorne is coming on a visit to the Clewbend, and as soon after as the young people can, I suppose we'll have the wedding." She was not the worst in the world to hear ill news from; besides the amusing style of her narrative, she left you no awkward pauses to fill up, never looking for a reply at all. And for Nellie to be personally interested in anything, however remote, connected with the Dodson family, would be simply impertinent, and it suited Nellie that Mrs. Dodson should think so. She had prepared herself for hearing his name without the happy flush of colour; instead, she felt a rod of ice penetrating to her heart, but her secret was safe.

In the evening, weary and headachy, she longed for a strong fresh breeze to blow on her from the river. Mrs. Dodson had taken the boys into Hacklebury to fit them in suits, and she was alone and miserable.

She thought of her drive with Alec—the first and the last. It was so good of him, she knew how good now, to take her with him, because she was the governess, and had little pleasure. At any other time to be alone would be happiness sufficient, but now her heart was full to the brim, and as she laid aside her work and looked out, she saw every leaf and flower nodding to her to come out into the sunshine, which beckoned her to follow, as it flashed towards the woods. And so she went, first lingering among the flowers, touching with her pink fingers each one she loved, pressing this one to her lips, laying that one against her pale cheek, and finally picking one tiny rosebud, she hid it in her bosom. But she must go and talk to the river and the woods, tell the old elm her trouble, whisper it to the willow, itself lying weeping on the cold bosom of the river.

No need of choosing paths to-day, all would be deserted now, he was otherwise engaged. She walked along quickly till she came to Godfrey's bridge; once over that, she could linger and drink in the calmness and the peace. But she did not linger, she still walked as though running from some pursuer. She was excited and nervous, but knew of a little nook at the foot of a beech-tree, a ferny hollow, where she could have it out, for there was much to come, her heart could not contain all it held, of sadness. She ran along the little reedy path almost crying, gained the nook, and found—Alec! There was no help for it, she could not keep back her tears any longer, brimming over as they were, and burying her face in her hands, she

burst into tears, and sobbed as if her heart would break.

"Nellie," said Alec, starting to his feet, "has anyone hurt or frightened you?"

Nellie could not answer but through her tears; she felt it was very hard not to be able to have her good cry as she promised herself; now she must dry her eyes as soon as possible, and not make herself ridiculous. So drying them and throwing back her head with a poor attempt at a smile, she answered him—

"No one has frightened me if you have not, only I came here to be alone, and——"

"And found me," said Alec.

"I must go now," she said.

"You have only just come," quoth he; "if one must go, let it be me."

Nellie strove to smile, and instead burst into a fresh flood of tears. Poor child, it was not a bit like her; but remember, all day long she had been waiting for this, and now they would not be checked. If she had had a mother they would have fallen on her bosom. Alec took her hand.

"Nellie, I was thinking of going to you when you came to me. Let me take it as a good omen. You know I love you. You found me here, wondering what would become of me if you would not be my wife. Nellie, will you?"

And this is what Nellie was running into the woods to hear! And she thought of Miss Pennithorne, his affianced bride, waiting for him at the Clewbend, and he here in the woods asking her to be his wife. She could not understand it; and his father and mother?

Oh, it was shameful; and yet—God help her! would she tell him a lie, and let him go?

“Nellie, darling, speak to me—do you love me?”

She raised her eyes to his, and formed a “no” on her lips, but she heard no sound, neither did Alec; and besides, her eyes spoke a quicker and truer answer to his question, so he drew her towards him, strangling the lie upon her lips, and raining his love in showers of kisses, the big, hungry fellow, but we must remember it is his first feast, and he coveted it long ago. But the paleness of her face alarmed him, and he cried, “What is it, darling? you do love me?” Not bad, Master Alec, for a shy man; and Nellie saw no reason to go over the farce again. She did love him dearly, and he knew it, but she managed to say between the kisses, “Your father?”

“My father is in love with you himself. He knows what I am doing.”

I wonder did he?

“Miss Pennithorne?” whispered Nellie, when she got another respite.

“Oh, Emily,” said Alec; “she’s all right, going to marry Weston. And now, Nellie,” he said, standing before her happy as a king, “do you really love me, and will you have me for a husband?”

Nellie put her hand calmly into his, and said “Yes.”

I do not think she had any idea how fond he was of kissing. Neither of them ever knew how they reached Mrs. Dodson’s. They certainly did not walk, and they proceeded too slowly for wings, but they were both as purely happy as any of God’s creatures. When they reached the little green door, Alec said—

"This is where we first met, and I loved you then."

"I hated you," said Nellie, laughing, and they parted, agreeing to keep their happiness a secret for a while.

To Miss Yukes and one or two other friends Mrs. Dodson spoke of Nellie as a "designing minx;" and when she heard of the romance enacted beneath her roof, she said, "Nothing would convince me but that she wound that 'soft stupid' round her finger." Wound round her very heart I believe he was, and she round his.

Mrs. Norton found her mental machinery quite inadequate to the strain brought to bear upon it. Her confidences with Miss Pennithorne resulted in perplexity, that young lady having shouted into her ears that Mr. Weston and she were "all right" now, and that she was very happy, and so was Alec; but Alec should have had the making of Emily's happiness, and it appeared he hadn't, and she had him thrown on her hands again, and not another girl fit for him in her eyes.

Mrs. Norton was a very weak woman. I have an idea that her small retreating chin was more characteristic of her mental powers than her high forehead, and rude shocks weakened her still more, and this was a very rude shock to find, when all was settled, as she believed, between herself and Emily, that it was utterly unsettling, and Emily, occupied with her own affairs, left her, quite unconscious that the little woman was suffering from a complete break down of her little system. She sat still, vainly striving to get on the lost track again, but she had not strength to reach so

far back as the starting-point. She thought, perhaps, if she went to bed and had a sleep her ideas might right themselves, and events clear from the haze ; so to the surprise of the household she went to bed while it was yet day, but her waking was, if anything, hazier than before. Doctor Orme came, but he found the machinery would not work, and for days she lay upon the shore of life waiting for the tide to rise and bear her into the great sea of the life eternal.

At last one evening, in the fading light, she looked at the sorrowing faces round her bed—husband, son, daughter. She knew them, and at the same time knew her summons had come ; the tide had risen, and bore her gently away on its bosom.

XXII.

CAPTAIN BLUNDELL had grown very familiar at the Clewbend during those days of watching by the sick-bed, and Miss Norton could not help being kind to him after his long and dusty ride, particularly as she was inclined to think she had something to do with these visits herself, and she liked him, and often turned to him for the comfort she could get nowhere else. The captain always spoke as he felt, hopefully, of Mrs. Norton's recovery, and no one else did, and the less we believe in a thing, the more we like to be assured of it ; and when he came one day and found the little gentle woman gone, he seemed really sorry, and expressed himself so well, that his return after a few weeks was looked for as a pleasure by all the household.

When his company was ordered out to India he rode like a madman across country; dusty and travel-stained, he asked for Mary, and told her she was the only woman in England worth a thought, that he was ready to die for her, but thought it wiser to live; that he was going abroad never to come back alive unless she bid him. It might be too hurried to ask for anything before he left, but in two years if he came back to her what would she say? All this and much more was poured forth in a rapid way, as if his thoughts were still gallopping. The whole was poured out, mixed with much in the way of parenthetical rhapsodies of love and adoration. Mary found this kind of proposal very trying; as a rule, the shortness of the ceremony relieves it from awkwardness, but the captain had a great deal to say, and whenever he did pause a second, he thought, "I had better say something more, as sure as a shot she's going to say 'no.'" So he set off on a fresh point from a nervous dread of a refusal. If he once gave her time to say "no," he was "shut up."

She liked him none the less for this modesty, but she did think he might give her a chance of answering before he told her all his mind. At last, after firing every "shot in his locker," he mentally exclaimed, "There, now, if she won't have me I'm done." And he waited for the reply which Mary found it very hard to give by reason of the long discourse. Which of his many "heads" would she take as her text? or would she adopt his plan and gallop through a kind of love lane? She wished he would say something short instead of looking at her in the deplorable, helpless

manner he did. Even his very beard had a more pensive droop.

"I am sorry you are going away," said she, beginning at the beginning.

"Oh," answered the captain, in a nervous manner, "I don't mind the going away, it is the coming back. Shall I come, Miss Norton?"

"Of course you will come back," said Mary, quite naturally. "Come back with your laurels, I hope."

"Not unless you bid me."

"Oh!" said Mary, much as if she said "Indeed!"

"I know you'd get plenty of fellows better than I am, but I'd never get anyone like you. Will you promise me in two years? I may be dead, but if I am alive I'll come."

"I cannot marry when I would," said Mary. "I have a dear cousin in sorrow, and two years ago I promised never to marry until I saw her happy."

The captain started to his feet.

"Oh," he said, "it's all the same; you've refused me, but you're too kind to hurt a fellow." And the tears *almost* stood in his blue eyes.

Mary could have boxed his ears, and in her heart she called him a "ste-upid."

"Forgive me, Miss Norton; I might have known better than to think you cared for me."

"But I do care for you," said Mary, with heightened colour, not the least knowing what might not happen from his blindness.

"You are very kind, but I look for more."

"What more?"

"Love," said the captain; "that is what I hoped for, but I was dreaming."

"You never asked me did I love you?" and the dark eyes, raised mischievously to his face for a moment, fell again.

"Oh, Mary, don't be cruel. What have I come for but to ask that?"

"Ask it, then."

This time she had her desire; a something or other about the damsel gave him hope. He sprang forward, took her hand, and with terrible emotion asked her if she loved him. She raised her eyes, and there was no need for him to hear her voice.

After a considerable time passed neither knew how, the captain was closeted with the old squire, and he remembered that the blue-eyed youth had been a favourite of dear Ann's, and he gave his consent.

Captain Blundell was madly in love, Mary quietly but deeply. She tortured him by making him understand how very uncertain it was, her ever marrying him, as she meant to keep her promise to her cousin. This cruel resolve nearly left him without beard, he so tugged and pulled at it in his dilemma. What was he to do? Such a foolish thing to promise not to marry before a girl whom many believed dead, and more believed married—it was monstrous! But Mary put her hand on his shoulder, and told him she knew her cousin was neither dead nor married, and that her promise had nothing at all to do with him, for he did not want to marry for two years, and she hoped long before that to see her dear cousin with them, and happy.

After another fit of tugging and biting, he said,—

“But, Mary, I thought, you know, if you really love me, darling, you might come with me—that is, not with me—but—I really don’t know how I can go without you two years! good heavens, it is an age.”

Mary laughed.

“I do love you, and I will not marry you for two years. What is it? nothing; and letters will make it pass all the quicker.”

“I’m afraid you won’t care for my letters,” he said lugubriously.

“Shan’t I? we’ll see; I declare I think you are sorry I did not refuse you as you expected.”

“Oh, Mary!” and it was some time before either were at liberty to resume the conversation.

The Boltens drove over to make the acquaintance of the family at the Clewbend, and their little Lily was brought with them, and Augusta was charmed with her intended sister-in-law.

“Tom is the best fellow that ever lived, Mary,” said the loving sister. “I only wonder at his leaving you behind, for I know what he thinks of you.”

“I am like the sailors,” said Mary, laughing, “I wish to prove my rope before I hang myself.”

He was a most satisfactory lover, and never spared himself, travelling for hours in the midst of business for the sake of one half-hour’s blissful companionship. And when the last day came, Mary got a long letter of farewell—he was afraid to come lest he should not be able to leave her! And the letter was eloquent and touching, with a rich vein running through it of simple unbounded affection. She cried over it, and carried it

in her bosom—it was the first love-letter she had ever got.

Alice heard of her aunt's death with much sorrow, and of Mary's engagement with profound pleasure. "It was so nice," she wrote, "to know Captain Blundell," and for her to have had "ever so little a finger in her joy." Of Alec's intended bride, she would have known nothing but for Tib, from whom she heard enough to make her look on cousin Alec as a "lucky fellow." She knew how troubled his poor mother would have been; it was as well perhaps that she was taken away where there was no need for her to understand the intricacies of the position.

"Oh, Miss Alice, she is just fit to be a queen," said Tib on hearing the news. "She's one of God's dear ones anyway, and she'll make a rare loving wife."

Mr. Harcourt had left Hacklebury, his young and fashionable wife deeming his talents worth a larger population. Nellie had gone once to the old home after her father's marriage, and had the pleasure of finding her conduct had been looked on as "most praiseworthy" in the eyes of her new relative, who found it so much pleasanter to have one of her own sisters living with her,—and Nellie's place was filled. In one thing she was a gainer by the removal from Hacklebury, for the picture of her own dear mother was taken down, and the new Mrs. Harcourt, not valuing it very highly, her father sent it to Nellie.

Oh, how she wept over it and kissed it! for the first time in her life she felt rich. And after parting with Alec that happy evening, she had knelt down before

it and cried her full heart out in tears of joy mixed with bitter tears of sorrow that she could not hear the gentle tones of that sweet voice. She felt death was indeed a cruel divider. And amid all this under-current of life and love, she lived her days of quiet.

Alice was often tempted to come back to the Clewbend. At times she felt so cut off and desolate, but then she would consider how much drearier her waiting would be apart from work. Oh, if she had time, how she could write upon the uses of "labour in adversity." She thanked God for giving her work to do, and she felt more drawn to Him while busy for His creatures. Her school-house was built, and she had found an efficient teacher.

It is only in going amongst the poor that you come to find out their wants. One day she was talking to a young wife—a stranger—who had come to keep house and home for a widower. He earned very good wages, but a good share went in tobacco and a larger share still in drink. The children were ill-fed and ill-clad, and the young woman seemed distressed at her inability to help them or better their condition.

"Could you not," said Alice, "leave just a little aside every week, to be spent neither in drink nor tobacco, but to go towards improvement: first of all to get clothing for those children, and then," she said, looking round the bare comfortless walls, "get some little home comforts?"

"Ah, ma'am," answered the young woman, "it is hard for the poor to save; we are not taught like the 'quality' to deny ourselves anything we can get. If I

did leave a trifle over, my man must know of it, and in the end it would go in drink. I tried it, ma'am, and got a little box, but he opened and emptied it twice on some little pressure coming—God help us."

"I shall think over some way of helping you," said Alice; "meanwhile send your eldest little girl up to me in the evening for some flowers; tell your husband he must not be behind his neighbours, and he must keep them watered and free from dead leaves. Good-bye, now; I hope to see you improving soon."

Her husband took the lady's message as a great compliment, and he walked up himself for the flowers, and thanked her. She had been thinking over the woman's story, and there were many like it in the village. So that when she found Mills had come himself, she at once told him of her intention to start a penny-bank.

He was an intelligent man, and not a drunkard, though he never passed a day without spending some part of his earnings at the "Royal Oak." "My missus," he said, "can do as she like with the wage, so be I gets my 'baccy' and drink, ma'am."

"And Mills," said Alice, with her sweet smile, "you will see that you do not take more than is just for that; both are luxuries, remember, and people who wish to get on are seldom able to indulge in them."

"I'll put it as reasonable as I can, ma'am, I will indeed."

"Thank you very much, Mills. I have spoken of this first to you, because you can help me by speaking of it to your friends, and letting me know their opinion to-morrow."

Mills spent the whole evening with his flowers, and for a wonder went to bed without paying his usual visit to the "Oak." At breakfast they talked over the new plan, and Mills said Bessy might carry up what would have gone in the drink the night before, and let it be the first instalment.

And this is how Alice added a penny-bank to her other works. The little bank-books showed the women at a glance how much was to their credit. The Mills were the first to show its success. It seemed a pleasure to him to save a little every night from his beer. "You know," he said, "every penny I bring home is seen after." Very soon the children had each new dresses—strong and warm. Mills himself looked quite smart in a blue and white necktie, and by-and-by a pretty little Dutch clock was hung up opposite the fire, out of which a lively little bird hopped at every hour and cried "cuckoo." This clock established the bank—it cost thirty shillings, and was saved in pennies from the beer. The neighbours collected to see it on its arrival, and for days they would run, in time, to see and hear the wonderful cuckoo.

The most enterprising among them began forthwith saving for another like it, and nothing was talked of but the wonders of the bank. It was all delightful to Alice. Her days were spent in doing good, her nights were often passed in tears; but as a rule, she gave only her half-hours to her grief. She knew if she let it, it would consume her, so she lived, and worked, and prayed, and hoped. Tib looked on approvingly; she was a fatalist, so far as her dear lady was concerned. "God saw it all," she would say to Alice, "and in His own good

time—He is faithful who promised—He has given you this work to do—in His own good time He will remember.” And Alice learned to trust Him and to wait.

“I must wait somewhere—better here,” she said.

Tib believed in God to a degree that would put to shame half the professing Christians which we meet. She had no theories, just as I said before, she had no creeds. She believed in Him, literally, to the falling of a sparrow; and whenever Alice spoke of the weary waiting, she would say, “Events take a deal of unravelling, and time will unravel all.”

Mr. Bolton felt he had special cause for thankfulness that Alice had ever come to the village; what had not her coming done for him? his wife's face never wore a cloud now. The little Lily grew, and so far as its adopted mother could see, the little one was good as she was pretty—strangely pretty she promised to be, with wondrous eyes of violet hue, and a passionate love for what was beautiful; if she saw a pretty dress, or flower, she would straightway lift it in her tiny palms, and kiss it with reverence, just as she would a pretty face. She loved her mother and her father; she would hear his step or voice before anyone else in the house, and go and meet him, and bring him in; then climb up on him as best she could, put her two arms round his neck, and kiss, and hug him all night long. She was very just in the distribution of her favours. All day she was her mother's darling—in the evening, her father's pet. She made their home bright and happy. Every night Mrs. Bolton went to the nursery the last thing to see that all was right, and the

moment she approached the crib, the child opened her eyes, smiled, held up her arms to clasp the bent down neck, and fell asleep again peacefully. Nurse might come and go about her pillow, turn, or cover her, and no movement showed the little one aware of it. At any hour that the beautiful face bent over her, as if her heart had eyes which never shut, the smile welcomed her, endearing her still more to her protector.

Mr. Bolton knew he could not thank Alice better than by doing something for the poor, so he delighted his wife by confiding to her his plan. "The people are so improved, Gusty, that, would you believe it, the second ale-house is changing its licence for that of grocer. Most of the men take their drink as usual, but all the loose pennies find their way to the bank, and the men see how much wiser it is to lay out their money on their own comforts than in making Dobbs prematurely rich. They support him fairly, they tell me, and would not wish to be without their beer. Simmons tells me only three of the men were obliged to take the pledge, and they hope to be morally strong enough not to be obliged to renew it next year. Mrs. More lends them books and papers, so I think the least I can do is to build a reading-room, where they can have a collection of books to suit their tastes and habits. What do you think of the plan, my dear?"

"What could I think but well of it?" she answered. "She has put us all to shame, for which of us would even begin doing what she has done? God sent her to them, and me, John."

This news made Alice glad.

"Oh, Tib," she said, "I wonder at myself for feeling

so happy. I should be miserable always, and I'm not."

"You're just what you ought to be, Miss Alice. I never could abide ungrateful Christians; because God doesn't see fit to give you the crown of rejoicing, don't dash His hand aside, it is always coming with mercies; and it will come with that too, trust Him, if you wait in hope."

"Ah," said Alice with a sigh, "I would that He would send me my heart's desire!"

"Don't say 'send,' Miss Alice; God will bring him, and that will be better than all else; He will *give* you your heart's desire."

"I wish I had your faith, Tib. Sometimes I doubt much if I shall ever see him."

"You are going the best way about seeing him anyway, for your lamp is trimmed, and oil in your vessel with your lamp."

"What do you mean, Tib?"

"I mean that you have not gone to sleep; you are bright with work, and duty, and when our Lord comes He shall find you ready."

"Who knows?" said Alice thoughtfully. But it placed her work before her in a new light, and it made it doubly sweet to link it with Godfrey's name.

XXIII.

ALEC and Nellie are to be married in spring, and he is to bring his wife to live at the Clewbend—so the old squire wishes. Herbert has gone to college, and the other boys have a dim and terrible vision of Snooks again. It is a pleasure to look at Alec, he is so happy;

and together, Nellie and he build their beautiful castles piece by piece, set in the magic of the future, gilt to the very top with their own bright hopes. In due time he brought her as his dear wife to his father's house. The old squire welcomed her with emotion, taking her as his daughter indeed.

The first little cloud which fell on their clear sky happened in this wise: Mary and Nellie were sitting together, working and talking, when the little patter of a pair of feet passed outside, and then was heard in the hall, and little Bricky, without any covering on his head, and with flushed face, pushed open the door, and came to Nellie, and huddled up close to her, asking her to keep and hide him. She asked him what was the matter, and after being well kissed, he told her that Mr. Snooks had whipped him for not learning his lessons, and he ran away to her through all the hot fierce sun.

"Why did you not learn your lessons, Bricky?" asked Nellie.

"I'll never learn lessons for anyone but you," he said, nestling close to her.

"Poor little scrap! We shan't talk of this now. Do you know, Bricky, I think I must send you to bed."

"Are you angry with me?" and the little flushed face looked up to hers.

"No," and she kissed him; "but I am afraid you will be ill."

"Then I'll have to stay with you," he said, brightening up. "Put me to bed, and they'll never find me."

And he was put to bed, the girls hoping no harm

would come to him, for he was hot and excited. When the sun went down Mrs. Dodson came after the truant.

"The little brat!" said the irritated woman, "to bring me all this way after him in the heat!"

"Will you let him stay with me for a day or two," said Nellie, "to wean him? He is not strong."

"I'll have no such nonsense! stopping me this way when I'm so busy getting ready for London, and after engaging a young man of superior talent to take the boys in charge. I'm greatly disappointed in the effect your training had on them, I can tell you. After all, there's nothing like a man. I admit *that*."

For her part, she was not going to let the present Mrs. Norton get the upper hand of her as the last had done. To be sure, as she said once before, she was no friend, only a sister-in-law.

Nellie could not go and waken the sleeping child and pack him off with his mother, so she made another attempt in his favour.

"Leave him with me," she said, "for the time you shall be away. I promise you will find him obedient on your return."

"Well, there's something in that," said the widow; "for, to tell the truth, though I could trust the young man with my life, still there are times when I couldn't expect him to look after a child of that age, so if you will take him off my hands, it's settled." And she walked off at once lest Nellie should repent of her bargain.

When the little fellow found he was to stay, his delight was sad to see; the only drawback was his keen regret that Bob and Lionel had not come with

him. He had wakened up hot and feverish, and Nellie was uneasy about him, and could not rest till she had seen the doctor.

"Keep him quiet," he said; "the little fellow has been over-excited, and hasn't much backbone." And he went away, after chucking him under the chin.

Bricky strove to run about and show his delight at being with Nellie, but often he had to go to bed, he felt so tired, and complained of noises in his head. He was petted by everyone. His mother had been gone some weeks before he mentioned her, and then every day he asked when would she be back, he himself growing weaker day by day. Nellie saw how it was to be from the first. She sat by him when he was in bed, and when he was up he spent most of the time in her lap, and a thousand times a day he told her how he loved her.

"Do you wish to leave me?" she asked one day, after his eager inquiry as to his mother's return.

"I won't leave you," he said, with earnestness; "but you would not keep me after mamma comes, nor would she leave me."

"No, dear," said Nellie, "I could not keep you from mamma; you will be glad to go home to the boys."

"Why did I never see papa?" he asked presently.

"Because he is dead."

"Must I die to see him?"

Nellie could not answer him. She was thinking of this little seedling about to be transplanted to more congenial soil, where it would grow and expand in the land of light and love. Stunted and starved here, he could not grow or thrive; would he develop there into

something grand and bright? Oh, the mystery of life, and love, and death!

The day before his mother's return he could not be stirred, he was so weak, so he lay all day upon his bed. Alec coming in at evening time, kissed his wife, and told Bricky how she had chosen to stay with him, though Cousin Mary and he would have to go without her, to dine out.

"Now, old chap, isn't it nice to be you, and isn't she fond of you?"

"Kiss me, Alec, before you go, and Cousin Mary too." When they were gone he asked, "Are you sorry you are not going with them?"

"No, Bricky, but so glad to stay with you."

"I am very happy," he murmured. "I'll go home, as you say, when mamma comes." Then he began prattling of the woods, and spoke as if they were all there together, as they used of old. About midnight he roused up, and asked in a tone of awe and fear, "Will God be angry with me if I go in without knocking?"

She kissed him, and held the little fluttering hand in hers. "Darling, Christ says, 'Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.'"

"Then I may go in."

And as the day was breaking she laid him down, and he went home to God.

And Alec and Mary coming in with hushed breath, knew, from Nellie's face and raised hand, that all was over, and the wearied watcher was carried away in her husband's arms. The whole household mourned

for Brick. Now that all was over, the old squire was anxious about his son's wife, and charged Alec to see she got well rested.

"She is asleep, father. Come and see her."

And both of them stood by her bedside; the old man stooped over, and kissed her lightly.

"Be careful of her, Alec, and God bless you both."

Towards evening, the next day, when all was still, the windows thrown open, and white flowers graced the little bed, cut and placed there by Nellie's hand, Mrs. Dodson came in with a rustle of silks.

"Where is my lamb?" she cried. "Oh! but I was the besotted woman to leave him behind me! There never was a child clung more to a mother than he did to me. I might have known it would kill him. Oh, my lamb! my lamb!"

Nellie drew aside the curtain, and showed the peaceful image of her living child. For a moment the mother's tongue grew still in the presence of that mystery. There lay little Brick, her youngest born, with the faint shadow of a smile not yet dead, lurking about the corners of his mouth, at the little trick he had played her.

"Isn't he beautiful?" she asked, making her eyes red with mopping. "I must have a cast taken of his face; I must have a photo taken for a locket. Oh, my lamb! and such an awkward time to die after my getting a lot of dresses, and now I must go into mourning. But don't you think a quarter of a yard of crape will do? He was young, you know. Oh! am I not to be pitied?"

Yes, Nellie pitied her, but was not surprised at

hearing no more of plaster cast or photograph, it was simply Mrs. Dodson's "way."

By the time the quarter of a yard of crape had grown rusty she threw it off, and contemplated a lighter style of "rigging" than any hitherto adopted. One of the Miss Browns was going to be married, and Miss Yuke, as in duty bound, carried the news. This was a rare harvest for gossips, and finding Miss Yuke a faithful carrier, Mrs. Dodson still held the threat unexecuted of "cutting" her, although the verdict was repeated to the few friends she had, and the "little girl" herself knew she was merely tolerated according to her cargo.

"Which of them is it?" asked the widow, after listening to a description of a long list of "things" ordered, and how many yards she was putting into the dress. Suddenly the widow asked—

"Which of them?"

"Ethel, the little fair one."

"Oh, my!" and the tone was very pleasant; "that's the captain's choice, and so she's gone. Poor fellow!"

"Have you not heard?" said the prisoner at the bar. "I do think you ought to have been told."

"Told what?" snapped Mrs. Dodson; "if you can tell it, do; and if not, just hold your tongue, Jane. I know as much about *him*, I can tell you, as anybody else, do you hear that?"

And Jane, feeling she had been ill-treated, neither "broke it soft" nor "drew it mild," as she at first meant to do, but blurted out—

"Do you know he's engaged to be married to Miss Norton, then?"

"No; and if he is, they have all throughout acted most shamefully."

"I know myself," added the culprit, "that he spent every day there before he left; and one day he rode to the Clewbend like a madman, and Mary Pennithorne told me that he proposed that day, and the like of them for lovers you never saw before. They are engaged."

"Then I say it's a scandal," said the widow, with a stamp of that same little foot which had lain in the captain's hand. "It's a scandal," she cried again, "but that comes of having no man to stand up for me. If I had I'd make him smart—to think of being made a fool of by the like of him."

"Oh, dear!" said Miss Yuke, "I hope I've done no harm in telling you. I never knew there was anything between you."

"He made love to me, I tell you," she screamed out; "and if I had one or two of his speeches on paper, I'd make him pay for his pleasure. It's money he's after, and he thinks the squire looks more likely than poor me with my fatherless children. I heard that he made inquiries about my income; and after all," said she, with a slight return to her senses, "I don't blame him. Perhaps if I encouraged him as others did, I'd have him, but I wouldn't do it; no man living is worth *that*."

While Mrs. Dodson was listening to the narrative of the faithless captain she felt both piqued and jilted, but soberly and with no one listening to her but herself, she spoke the truth and agreed it was better to treat the whole affair with silent contempt. She visited the

Clewbend that very day, and announced her determination of leaving Hacklebury.

"Eh, dear," she said to Mary, who expressed her regret, "eh, dear, this is no place for me; I never could live without a barrack. I was always accustomed to that and tip-top society, which isn't here. It was all very well while I was in mourning, but I have no idea of laying out money and paying swell bills for nothing."

"Oh, aunt," said Mary, laughing, "we don't wear clothes for nothing—decency, you know."

"You may laugh, Mary, I suppose you can afford it, I can't. I'll break new ground. I hear of a nice house near Leconfield, close by the barrack. I think I can afford to keep a carriage, and no doubt some nice people will call upon me; in fact," she said, "I know the wife of the colonel of the regiment."

The widow stopped, and as she spoke all through as if Mary and Nellie were in fault, they hardly knew whether to applaud or condemn her decision.

"I never was in such a place in my life," she went on; "I might just as well never have been in Canada, nobody wants to know anything. Eh, dear! neither place nor people are my style. I was always accustomed to society, I can tell you that." And she flounced out of the room, shaking herself in a manner to suggest no return.

"Poor Aunt Dodson," said Mary, smiling, "she could talk of herself all day long. I wonder if she ever thinks what fun she is?"

Mrs. Dodson was really fond of society, and rather than spend her evenings alone, she had recourse to

Mr. Snooks. He was a very young man, with a little light hair scattered barely on his head, white down on his chin, weak, silly-looking blue eyes, piped with pink, and a pugnacious cast of countenance altogether. Before Nellie's engagement as governess he attended the boys every morning, and their mother every evening. She felt she could command him, and she did. She consulted him on business matters, and told him exactly how she "stood." She sent him on many errands, and paid him at supper in cold pie, oysters, and good wine. At this period his affection for her sprang from the stomach, and when the suppers were cut off he pined and grew thin. When Nellie got married Mrs. Dodson turned the light of her countenance upon him once more, remarking to herself how manly he had grown, and that her suppers would not be quite thrown away now. It had been her custom in the old time to recline on the sofa while he read to her some poem treating of love, but as the hour drew on for supper, regardless of the touching story which oftentimes absorbed the reader, she would exclaim—

"There, now, that will do; ring the bell, and you can finish it to-morrow evening."

She somehow did not feel equal to the renewal of the intercourse now. He was a boy then, not much older than her own son, but now?—he was a man, trod with a firm step, and looked at her with undisguised admiration, so she thought it might be wiser to determine what footing they were to be on. Miss Yuke's news decided her, and she walked home from the Clewbend this lovely morning, just admitting to herself that a certain thing might not be bad, after all. She would

have her eyes about her, and see if what she thought was really the fact, after which she could quietly wait till she saw what came of the barrack and the carriage.

XXIV.

NEXT morning as Mr. Snooks was passing the morning-room on his way to the school-room, a voice called his name. She had come downstairs in a handsome dressing-gown, with her dark hair falling round her shoulders. She looked in the glass, and smiled at her youthful appearance, as she caught sight of Mr. Snooks. He turned round smiling too.

"Will you come here and look at my finger? There must be a thorn in it, I think."

He came in, taking the white, plump hand in his with all the reverence of his first communion. He looked and found the thorn, then raising it to his lips, he drew it out.

"Cleverly done, upon my word," said the widow, with a smile; "I'll be alone this evening if you care to come."

"Ah, Mrs. Dodson," said the weak-eyed youth, "how you do put things, to be sure—'care!' As if I ever 'cared' for you, since I first knew you, and you were kind to me."

She stopped him, not wishing to have more said just now.

"There, now, go to the boys, and we'll talk about 'caring' to-night."

He went away smiling, and so did she.

She sat down before the glass, and drew the comb

through her tresses, and then proceeded to brush and think. Presently she laid down the brush, and raised the dark hair on her temples, looking critically if the white threads were increasing. To judge from the sigh which accompanied the look, they were not lessening, and her remark may give the reader a clue to her thoughts.

"Well, I do think I'm right—a woman left as I am must have someone to look to ; he's young and talented, and loves me—I found that out—and what more does anyone want ? And I can manage him."

Having come to this conclusion, she arranged her hair in its most becoming style. When the hour drew on the widow was in the drawing-room, the boys were in bed. She had seen that there was a fair share of veal pie, and other appetizing dainties, to appear on the supper-tray. She knew very little music, but she sat down to warble to the piano her favourite song, "The Danube River." It "went well," she said, "with her 'low tones.'"

Before the song was ended, the guest came. He carried a quantity of gilt jewelry about his person, and he floated in a sea of musk and "macassar." She jumped up at his entrance, but sat down again on being told he was "miserable" for disturbing her. So he came to her side, and turned over the leaves for her, standing so that she could easily look into his eyes when she came to that "night in June." She looked and blinded him ; he never had much of an eye, but it seemed as if its light went out for ever with the fire of her gaze. He turned no more leaves, for his weak sight was centred on her face. She never blushed beneath it

all, bless you, not she ! She sang her song to the end. and then turning round to him she said, with a smile,—

“ Well, are you satisfied ? You look it, upon my word.”

“ Adorable creature.”

She heard the words well, though it seemed as if he *thought*. She threw back her head, and laughed loudly—he frowned.

“ I’ve come here to-night,” he said, “ to know how it is to be between us—if you are content with ‘ caring,’ I’m not. Oh, Phelia,” he took her asunder, and put her together again to suit himself, “ don’t kill me by telling me to leave you, for I couldn’t. Death only must part us twain. I have loved you long ; you must have guessed it. Answer me.”

If she had answered him as she felt just then, it would have been something after this fashion,—
“ Hoity toity ;” but she thought it wiser to think over it, as she would over any other article presented to her for sale. “ Is it worth the price ? is it suitable ? do I want it ?” So she answered after a pause,—

“ What can you know about love ?”

“ I know you, and therefore love.”

An answer which she thought very clever.

“ What made you first think of me ?”

He might have truthfully answered, “ Yourself ;” or he might have said, “ From the day I mastered your accounts and knew your exact income, from that day I knew your worth ;” but he was not a green youth of that complexion, so he answered,—

“ How can you ask such a question ? I would not

insult you by knowing you without thinking of you."

"Upon my word," *said* the widow, but she *thought*, "it is nice to be wooed by talent."

"How can I tell whether you love me at all or not?"

"If you give me leave, I'll soon prove that," he *simpered*.

"And if I don't?"

"I'll prove it either way."

"It's very hard for us girls to trust you men. How am I to prove you?"

"By marrying me?"

"Oh, fie, fie! we've not got so far as that yet."

"You may not," he said, "but I have gone through it all, baptism, confirmation, and communion. Oh, do not trifle with the love I offer you; let me prove it, and you will find it strong enough to bear you up through this weary life; you will find it by your side in sorrow's hour; you will find it a shelter from the storm, and a refuge from the blast; it will be with you in life, in death, and in heaven where all is love."

"Eh, dear, if you don't speak well on it. I declare you've brought the tears to my eyes with your eloquence."

"That's nothing," he answered, modestly, "to what I feel in my heart for you."

"I don't believe," she said, looking mischief, "that your heart has anything to do with it."

She did not know how very near the truth she was. Yes, his stomach had more to do with it, but we none

of us may cast a stone, for it is not far from everyone of us.

He turned his eyes to her face again, and his weak sight grew stronger as he looked at the puckers around her mouth—humorous, merry, conceited—and with a sudden dash of “devil-may-careism,” he threw his arms about her portly person, and rained a thunder-shower of kisses on every bit of her face and neck, even to the lace which would not hide her charms. He held her a long time until she was ready to cry, “enough.”

“Now what do you think of my love?” he cried; “does it suit you, or will I make it stronger?”

“Eh, dear no,” she said, arranging her hair which had been actually kissed with the rest.

“I never got it so strong as that before; ah, well,” and she gave him her hand, “I do believe you love me, dear; you can do as you like with me after that.”

“Just now,” he said, “I should like to do this,” and he put her two arms round his neck, and he looked into her eyes until his own blinked, and then he said, “Kiss me, darling.” And she kissed him very rapturously, lingering about the fluffiness of his manhood quite long enough to content him. And then they had supper; knives and forks, glasses and tongues clattered away together; they made a hearty meal, for what with changing and exchanging hearts, they found they had a “vacancy to fill.” He kissed her again at parting, and whispered a lot of sweet stuff with his “good-night.”

“I shall be miserable till this time to-morrow.” He

thought it as well to secure his invitation, and then added, "Think of my state and you will not lengthen my torture."

She said no more than "Come to me to-morrow night."

"Thank oo." And he was gone.

Let us follow the youth down a narrow street; he stops at a house near the end, and lets himself in with a latch-key. He mounts every flight of stairs in the house to reach his bedroom, a small, stuffy apartment, which does duty as sitting and bed room in one. On the table is a plate, with a piece of crusty bread, another plate, with a lump of jagged, dirty cheese; a knife, jug, and tumbler, complete his usual evening meal. He laid down the flat tin candlestick on the table, beside his supper. Faugh! such fare, indeed! only fit for beggars or lunatics. His face is flushed, his eyes set in red circles, the effects of wine and night air. He takes off his coat, and looking to the far corner of his abode, he forthwith flings it there; each article, as it is taken off, meets with the same fate; he then sits down on the side of his bed, draws off his boots, committing each to different regions. Crossing his legs and arms, he leans his back against the iron rail, and goes over in thought the evening's work, and the result attained.

"Faith," he said, laughing, "the old girl takes a lot of kissing, doesn't she? I'm blest if I care how much I slabber her now; precious little of me she'll taste after 'mat.' By Jingo, she little guesses what she's getting in me—a master!" And he laughed at the idea, clasping his hands behind his head.

"Money is a fine thing; see what it gives a man." And he lay there, dreaming of what it would give him, and what it would bring him—this money, which he so dearly loved, but which was hard and slow to earn.

"I wonder," said he, after a little, "does she think I'll keep on kissing and fooling with her through life, and thank her for a guinea a month pocket-money? Oh, my Philly, you'll soon find I can put the 'bit' in your mouth."

Then, going to a private cupboard, he poured out a quantity of brandy, and drank it off to his own success.

Mrs. Dodson had not intended allowing the love-making to go quite so far, not knowing what might come of her change of residence, and her own oft-repeated avowal, "Eh, dear, but I'd like an officer." But love-making is catching, and she was as ready to respond to young Snooks as ever she was to Captain Blundell, and this same night she retired an engaged woman, fully convinced that she was powerless to resist this new lover, and consoling herself with the reflection that, "Try as she would, she might never get better."

Mrs. Dodson changed her residence, and her mind too, on one or two matters. To begin with, she did not see why she should lay out money on a carriage, before looking about her, now that she was "disposed of."

"Not but what I could do as I like yet, if Major Tweedie wished."

This gentleman was the only visitor she could boast of, from her change of locality, and she found him rather hard to see through. She had met him one

day, on a new and lonely road, and had asked her way home; he showed it by walking with her to her own door. She invited him in, to take a glass of wine; he raised his eyebrows, went in, and came out fully informed of her family history, position, fortune, et cetera, and a general invitation to drop in to luncheon any day. She made so much out of his simple act of courtesy, that he wondered where she had come from. Very soon Mr. Snooks' suppers suffered from Major Tweedie's luncheons. He voted the widow a "jolly boy," lay on her sofas, and often dozed there, too. Of course, it was her interest to keep her morning and evening guests apart, for she was fully alive to the consequences likely to follow a meeting. And her hands were full between them both, for Mr. Snooks was as ardent as ever; indeed, he grew so bold as to talk of the "day," and she fluttered and puckered over it, and was as shy as any young damsel.

She enjoyed the love-making—let it last. She knew from experience it was not the worst part of life. He was not of her opinion. She startled him one day by telling him she would not marry an idle man. "I couldn't be bothered with you in my way all day long."

"You can name your hours, and I'll attend to them," answered the lover; and she looked at him keenly, to see if there was more in the answer than met her ear.

"You must get something to do," she continued; "I wouldn't be spoken of with my children's teacher for all the world. In my position, I think I can ask that much."

"Lord Hacklebury has promised me the next ap-

pointment in the Lincolnshire Militia, and I'll wear a red coat to please my lady."

"Well, that itself," sighed the widow, as she found the inevitable Mr. Snooks narrowing round her. She was very much in love with him, after her fashion. She was proud of his youth, and told herself, and him, that her late husband, though the father of her children, was never as dear to her as this boy; and yet she kept him lingering in suspense until—well, Major Tweedie might. And if he did, that would be doing it nicely indeed. But he ate her pies, drank her wine, lolled on her chairs and sofas, and this was all. He sometimes took the boys out in his yacht, fishing; and he probably thought this a fair return for the luncheons.

In his own heart, he held a vision of a fair, calm woman, soft-voiced, and sweet; to her he had long ago sworn allegiance, and to her, so long as life lasted, he would be true. And this is the reason why Mrs. Dodson gets none of Major Tweedie's flirting, though few in her Majesty's service had shown more proficiency in that particular branch before now.

He looked on the widow as a little "queer," but jolly and good-natured; and, not caring for the fast society of the garrison, he thought himself fortunate in making the acquaintance of this "motherly" woman, who welcomed him so warmly, and made him feel so much at home.

He sometimes wondered that the boys were not more with her. They are both at luncheon the day after her little talk with Mr. Snooks; the day a bright, brisk October one, just a day for satisfying healthy appetites; and the Major's is always healthy.

"I wonder," he said, in answer to one of her remarks, "I wonder you do not choose to live in your native place; from what you tell me, it would be greatly to your advantage, I should think."

"They are tip-top people, I can tell you that, Major; but, eh, dear! there's not a creature in Tullydiddles but themselves; and for me, wishing, as I am, to be settled, that wouldn't do."

"And do you not feel settled?" asked the innocent Major.

She burst out laughing, and lay back in her chair, wiping her eyes with her handkerchief.

"Eh, dear! you men are sly; you pretend, now, that I—look at me; not old, eh?—must not think of such a thing as 'settling,' because I was once settled." Then, straightening herself, and looking composed, she added, "No, Major, I am not settled; a woman young as I am, wants someone to see she gets her rights. I'm rich, healthy, and not bad looking; what should prevent me from being happy?"

The Major was silent; he was afraid to be her echo, and ask "What?" lest she should answer "You." He was uncomfortable, and wished himself safe in his rooms. He had heard strange stories told of fellows being "hooked:" by Jove, if he had compromised himself in any way, and it should come to certain little pink ears! What a fool he was, to be eating and drinking in any woman's house, day after day, and not know what it all meant! Had there been a daughter in the case, he would have been sharp enough; but, gracious heavens! a woman of her age, with great lads of sons, to talk of being alone in the world, and all

that sort of rubbish ! All this passed through his mind as he sat, instead of answering her as she expected. She saw his embarrassment, and guessed its cause, so she did not spare him.

"And so you are astonished at hearing an old woman like me talk of marrying ?"

"Excuse me," murmured the Major; "I was thinking of something else, I assure you. I was only astonished," he added, with a bow, "that you have not long ago made some good man's home happy."

"I wouldn't have every one," she confided to him; "when I do change, I mean to do it nicely. I am left very well off, my boys are provided for, and I do think I could make some one very happy."

"I cannot doubt it," said the soldier, entrenching himself behind short sentences.

"You are very sober," she said, pushing the wine towards him; "perhaps you're contemplating something of the same kind, Major, yourself, eh ?"

The Major coloured; he could not bring himself to tell this woman of his life's hopes, and soil *her* name by giving it to such lips, so he said,

"Men must be richer than I am, who wish to marry."

"Not a bit of it," she answered, encouragingly; "you're rich enough for any woman; you're a fine man, and women are not so expensive as you think, I can tell you that. What would you say, now, I dress on in the year ? and I'm always nice."

What would have become of the unfortunate Major it is hard to say. He felt, himself, that he was a mouse, with whom this lady cat was playing—cooking him, in fact, until she thought fit to swallow him; but

the appearance of a mounted orderly put an end to the widow's manœuvres, and called him away. How pleasantly the fresh air felt to him on his liberation. He was hot, yes, hot as any coward. He felt his release the more fortunate, because he had considered himself in danger. He had put it to himself, as he sat fronting her, suppose she asked him point blank would he marry her, what could he say? He drew a sigh of relief and gratitude as he mounted his horse, and bade "good-bye" to the widow and her pies. On reaching the barracks, he astonished young Captain Rivers by proposing to take his place with the company tenting it at Aldershot. The Captain was delighted to stay, the Major to go, and so it came to pass that Mrs. Dodson saw his face no more. The little common sense left told her that, matrimonially, her chances were as few here as in Hacklebury, so she allowed her youthful lover to have it all his own way; and his way was to be married at once. He had not been blind to the widow's flirting proclivities, but he coolly let it pass, entering it on the table of his memory, among the items to "pull a strong hand" on.

XXV.

ONE night the supper was extra substantial, and the lady extra sweet. After supper she invited him to sit by her, as she reclined on the sofa. He sat very close to her indeed, and somehow contrived to slip his arm beneath her portly shoulders, and so help to sustain her weight, in a most lover-like attitude. She took his attentions sweetly, and inclined her head towards

him, till it rested on his shoulder. It was rather an uncomfortable position, but he bore with it; it was the first time, and would likely be the last, for the young gentleman who aspired to be her partner was not at all likely to lose his title of "master;" in fact, he was a young tyrant, and of such stuff are they generally made, plausible, sweet, and smiling when anything is to be gained by it, or when they are in your power, but reverse the order, and they take possession of you body and soul: their smiles then are for strangers, their music not for you; such a man's friends are not those of his own household. But all this would come on Mrs. Dodson some day as a surprise, for self-conceit filled her eyes with her own charms, and they were sufficient, she thought, to make this raw youth worship "the ground she trod on;" and when he leered with his mouth, and said with his eyes, "I could eat you," she simpered and smiled, nestling on his shoulder; and after her couple of glasses of wine, she felt at peace with herself, if not with all mankind.

"Eh, dear!" she said, "but this is nice. I declare I think I'm a fool to marry you; you'll go off by-and-by on your own account, and leave me alone on my sofa: don't tell me, that's the way with you men—lovers while pursuing, but your pleasure is gone when we poor timid things are caught."

"I hope," he said, with emotion struggling in his face, and feeling quivering in his voice, "that you will find in me your true lover till death parts us. Will it not be so, dearest?" And he pressed his lips on hers.

"Oh, those kisses," she said, on recovering her breath,

"they make a fool of me : well, upon my word, I never met anyone that could kiss like you."

"My kisses are seals : let me seal you up as 'my very own.'"

"Now listen to me," said the widow. "I think you owe me a great deal ; first of all, to listen to you, with my prospects and position, and then, to hold firm, although sore pressed, I can tell you, by a man that any woman might be proud of, and an officer, too. I told him in this room that I was bound in heart and word. Poor fellah ! he was greatly cut up. I hear he exchanged on the head of it, with a brother officer, and is off to the camp. Now I think after that I'm entitled to ask a favour of you, and to be thought of, too."

"Dearest," he said, with his weak eyes looking into hers—"sounding her soul," as he expressed it—"speak and have, if mine to give."

"Well, to tell the truth, I am not strong-minded enough to have my cards printed, 'Mrs. Andrew Snooks,' with my position, and my connections, I dare not do it."

"I knew, dearest, I had no name worthy to bestow on you. I am not proud of our patronymic : it came into our family with a large fortune, displacing the old historic name of Villeneuve. We are of French extraction. I can easily take up that name again, and will at once see to it, my darling."

"Villa-noove," repeated the widow ; "yes, I like it ; there's something uncommon about it, not like Brown or Smith, that one is sick of. Mrs. Villa-noove will be grander even than Dodson ! Very well, dear ; and when you're about it, you might as well take some

other name than Andrew, I don't much like it; and as soon as you have changed your name, then—" with a sweet smile, and another seal, "then I'll begin to think of changing mine. There, now, ain't I good to you? So go home, and dream of me."

The "good-night" took a little more than half-an-hour to get through; he kissed her, and pressed her hands, in a maniac manner; he kissed her neck; he would go a little way, and come back to renew the process over and over, until at last, carried away by his devotion, she threw her arms round his neck, crying,

"You would make a stone love you, you dear, darling pet."

And she kissed him into his senses. He liked kissing, but not being kissed, so when her shower was over, he stepped out, closing the door behind him. This was a necessary precaution, for each night, as he stood in the hall to put on his coat, he was waited on by a good-looking young maid, who, as she held the door open, was sure of her own good-night, in the shape of a coin and a kiss.

"Good-night, Cherry; when I'm master you'll have good times."

It is highly probable that when that time came, the "master" was not as particular about the closing of the door as the lover had been.

In the course of time, those who were interested in such things might read in a short paragraph in the *Times*, headed "Change of Name," "Whereas Andrew Snooks, gentleman, . . . had decided on taking the name of Leopold Montmorency Villeneuve, he hereby gave notice that in future," etc.

Mary read it at the Clewbend: she did not know Mr. Snooks; she said he was right, and they all laughed. No one who did know Mr. Snooks read it at all, except Mrs. Dodson, and to her it was poetry and music in one.

"Eh, dear! well, upon my word, he has given me my wish in the handsomest manner; and, Lord! what a name for a card! Oh, I declare that's grand!"

The wedding could not possibly be delayed after this. Mrs. Dodson decided it should be private. She was not ashamed of herself, but she just meant none of the Hacklebury gazers should be there that day.

Seated round their happy breakfast table at the Clewbend, Alec, with a preliminary "Hallo," read aloud the first intimation of Mrs. Dodson's happiness.

"On the 6th inst., at the Garrison Church, Leconfield, by the Rev. Frank Duster, assisted by the Rev. Canon Field, Leopold de Montmorency Villeneuve, 1st Lincolnshire Militia, to Ophelia Wilhelmina, relict of the late Lionel Dodson, of Craigthorpe House, Argyleshire."

The old squire was not quick enough to take in all the meaning as Alec read, so he got the *Times* into his own hands, to comprehend it more leisurely.

"Oh, my eye," said Alec, "Aunt Dodson has caught a high-flyer."

"You know," said Mary and Nellie in a breath, "she always said when she did do it, she'd do it nicely, and it seems she has;" and both the girls laughed, while the old squire carried off his *Times* to the fire, and left them to their merriment. After a little he called out to his son, handing him the paper, "Here, Alec, read

this ; it strikes me it's another verse of the same story. The two girls got up and looked at the paper, too, one over each shoulder, and read the paragraph again headed "Change of Name."

"I say, father, it's an awful shame," said Alec, turning round with his face very red. "Did you ever know anyone of the name of Villeneuve?"

"My memory is not what it was once, Alec, but I think when I was a young man I remember a dancing master of the name."

"Poor woman, I pity her," said Nellie.

"I don't," answered her happy husband ; "but she disgraced the name of Dodson long enough—thank God she's done with *that* ! as the dear woman would say herself."

And now we must come back and pick up Clarence Bennimore once more ; he is still member for Leconfield, lives an easy life of pleasure, spends most of his time at his club, and is a favourite with a few very young horsey members—he is following his father's steps pretty closely, and is, perhaps, too well known on the turf. But he finds the rungs of his ladder are sometimes very slippery. When he first became a member, he was so elated that all things, even business, was hallowed in his eyes ; he felt himself big with brains, and he determined to put his shoulder to the public wheel and tool it over many a dirty rut. He was not an idiot, but he felt that young blood was better than old. He preferred young men to be in power, and of all the young men of his acquaintance he thought himself the cleverest. What wonder then if

he was elated? He worked hard to become possessed of his whistle, but when the bill came in, his breath left him; and the bill came to him in many forms. Men whom he had never seen, and of whom he had never heard, came forward with all the freedom of having helped him to his perch—they all buzzed round him like wasps.

But for this fret and worry about money his life might seem an enviable one; but clever and aspiring men must pay the penalty of greatness. He had taken that which was not his own, but each day this became an easier task, and now, after two years' experience, he felt strong to do; and he also felt himself a favourite of fortune, for "no consequences" had followed deeds of his which even the strength of his vanity could not uphold. The first qualm over—and to have a qualm at all was in his eyes "soft"—he threw sentiment overboard, and did his business with a high hand; he flattered himself now, as he had done before, that he was not bad because he never studied or planned his sin—it was strange logic, but it suited him.

It was by the merest accident he heard that a considerable sum of money lay at the bankers to Godfrey's credit,—quite a distinct sum from that of which he took possession on first stepping into his brother's place. He counted the banker amongst his friends, and in talking over Godfrey's absence one day, Mr. Long happened to mention the circumstance. Clarence found it prudent to keep up the illusion that his brother's whereabouts was not unknown to him. This was so natural that no one could suspect any deceit,

and on hearing this news he chuckled over his own sagacity, for letters from the bank, as well as others, fell into his hands for transmission abroad, all of which, in due time, received answers through him. To do this successfully, it was necessary he should copy his brother's hand—an art in which he excelled. He wrote to the bank in Godfrey's name, under cover to himself, telling them he should never return, and that to his brother land and property belonged, also informing them that he had signed a cheque in Clarence's favour for this particular sum of money.

When this was accomplished, he looked on it as his crowning piece of head-work. Of course anyone but himself would have made a muddle of it, and perhaps run the risk of—what? “Ha, ha! by Jove, no.” And after all, he asked, what had he done? Come now, he had his brother's letter to show that he was master, and could not he do what he liked with his own? And even this he had not studied; it sprang into his brain on reading the bank-letter, that letter of queries as he called it, and the thought he put down to genius. Who knows? it may have been his evil genius? We have seen before this that his line of reasoning necessitated whatever he did being right. “Success!” ah, that was the word.

This same sum of money still lay at the banker's unclaimed—all the better to allay suspicion—though badly needed; there it lay, teaching him a lesson of self-restraint. But at last the day came when demand must be satisfied. And when he left the counter with the supply in his grasp, a keen-sighted observer might well suspect him, from his nervous hold of it—his

glistening, greedy eyes, and the clammy dew which broke over his face.

He was so far human that for days and nights after this exploit he started at the slightest sound, looked round uneasily if he heard a footstep following him; just as a coward dies many deaths, so hath the sinner many judgment days.

At night he drew out his secret drawer and gloated over his gold, smiling at it as representing many a pleasure; though debtors, like ravening wolves, had their mouths stopped by part of it, he anticipated being able to make a few gentlemanly bets on the forthcoming race. He never went near the "Firs"—the place was hateful to him now, for it was haunted by the past. He admitted having made one mistake so far in his life: that was quarrelling with his friend Finch. A clever enemy is often made out of a bad friend. He was in Grab and Growler's hands now. Mr. Grab was no cleverer professionally than Mr. Finch. And he felt afraid he was somewhat in that gentleman's power; for Finch, being an enemy, did not hide any little affair calculated to dim the lustre of his quondam friend. He had added, indeed, somewhat to the list, as a loose life like young Bennimore's leaves many stray threads and snips for a man like Finch to pick up. On one occasion Clarence had to buy up one of those disreputable snips at a smart figure. He thought more than once of beginning a new life, with that popular woman of whom he had heard so much at the Boltons, but a slight feeling of something connected with Captain Blundell's "good-bye" prevented him from again seeking Mr. Bolton's hospitality; and

besides, when he came to think of it, was there not a skeleton there too ?

"Oh, d—— it all, I have too many cupboards." And he stretched himself before the fire, stroking his thin, dark moustache with an air which said plainly, after all, "Ah, you clever, lucky dog!"

It was the night before the great race, and he had a couple of hours only for rest. He had many bets, besides the great bet of the day, which was to bring him a "pot of money."

Well, it has come and gone—the great day, and the great race—and with it vanished the heap of gold. "Paradox," that "wonderful horse," galloped round the course in splendid style, with his Roman nose held proudly up, but by that very nose-length "Blue Boy" had passed the winning-post, carrying with him much besides his well-known jockey. Clarence betted like a prince, and even when the horses were led away, and loud hurrahs rent the air, he would not believe in failure.

"What has your belief to do with the fact?" asked a tall, wretched-looking youth at his side; "'Blue Boy' has won, and we may go to the d—l."

Clarence swore hard, and drank hard, and swore again, but if anything could console him, it was the fact that he was suffering in first-class company; and the Duke of N—— actually patted him on the shoulder, then linking his arm in his, they went off together to drink a little more. Seated in his own room once more, untidy and slipshod, with nothing to gloat over, for his accounts were all cast up on one side of his book; nothing left to him but his brains; they were

not all used up, and they shaped his actions for him thus.

"I must sell the 'Firs;' what am I keeping it for? I'll never marry; and, hang it, I could not better fulfil Godfrey's wishes than by giving the old folk a new master and landlord."

Grab and Growler had instructions accordingly, and in due time the sale was announced.

XXVI.

LADY workers will tell you that it is a most uninteresting thing to take up dropped stitches. Of course, the whole proceeding of stitches is a mystery to me, but I would do my best not to be uninteresting, and yet there are some stitches which must be lifted, or the work will not hold together, but ravel out in disorder. One of those stitches has dropped a long way behind in our story, and I feel it is high time to pick it up, and let it appear in the fabric we are weaving.

Godfrey Bennimore stayed some months in Calcutta after his friend Dr. Sayle had left. He was preparing himself for work which would take him some hundreds of miles up the country. The place he had chosen was a most unhealthy one, and inspector after inspector was sent there, and "told off" as incapable. Godfrey undertook it with his friend's prescription, "Temperance in everything, and plenty of work." He hoped to overcome all hindrances, and here he established himself. Wearied of life, without having lived, he might as well fulfil his days here as elsewhere, but he found that work brought him comfort, filling his

angels, his poor black nurse fanning him with devoted assiduity. He did not doubt the reality of his dream, the echo of the music was still faintly with him, as if heard through a distant door; the sweet pressure of his mother's lips was still upon his brow. He put up his hand to feel the very spot, and the words "She is not here. Go, seek her," were as distinct in his ears as if the actual vibration of sound had not yet died away. The dream had its effect upon him, and may have been more real than any of us know. That night, lying on his bed, he separated himself, as it were, from himself, and while the poor weak body lay helpless and languid, the healthier and stronger portion took the seat beside him, and thus began.

"Why did you not go home to your duty, instead of coming out here to die?"

Answer from the sick-bed: "Because I was a coward."

"Yes, a thorough coward; you have kept your grief as a phantom to haunt your steps, instead of burying it out of sight, like a man."

Answer: "It was all that was left me; I cannot live without it."

"You never tried, because you came out here with it, instead of first going home and burying it. There are more things than one for a man to live for. You are selfish."

"You are very hard on me, but I know it is true."

"Of course it is true; you look at your grief as if you were a fly, making mountains of atoms; you leave home, and country, and poor dependents to be despoiled and ruined, for what you care, so long as you

can hide yourself and your phantom. You are not fit for heaven, you are too selfish."

"What can I do?"

"Go home."

"What for?"

"To do your duty. First of all, be a man, and thrust your hand into your grief, examine it, believe it, make use of it, and then bury it out of sight, in the life you live for the good of your people."

Answer from the sick-bed, after a long interval :
"Yes, I will go home."

And he kept his word with his inner and better self. And as soon as ever he was able, he crawled by slow stages back to Calcutta, and there, one fine morning, he went on board the fast sailing screw steamer "Orion." He stood on deck once more, in his right mind, looking towards the land he was going to with straining eyes. He almost lived so, with his face set homewards, to life and duty, never once casting a glance behind him : he was retracing his steps, with what emotions and feelings it would be difficult to imagine. Standing on deck, as the ship floated into the London Docks, he for the first time in almost three years thanked God. In half-an-hour he was speeding to the bank, for one of the sensations peculiar to finding oneself in London is the immediate necessity of having something in one's purse.

"No account," was the answer returned to his demand ; and it so astonished and alarmed him, that he exclaimed, "It cannot be." The clerk looked at him keenly, then showed him the entry in his book, and as a bank counter is the last place for conversation, with

life with it, left no place for the past to steal in. Never seeing the face of a friend, nor hearing his voice, what wonder if every month stood out in his mental calendar as twelve. Though he would not admit it, in his heart he knew this life would kill him; was killing him even now. A man cannot cut off every tie which binds him to life without being hurt, and he had cut himself off as completely as if he was dead. Of course he could write to his brother, but somehow, that letter received at Vevey seemed to him an open grave, into which he must fall by moving backwards. He strove to live forward; but, as we have seen, there were times when the barriers were swept away, and sorrow, like a great wave of the sea, carried him whither it would. There was this difference between his grief and that of Alice, that while she could hope, knowing there was life, with him all hope was over. He knew not how to meet her, except through the gate of death, and even then should he meet her? or was he to forget her in death? Perhaps so; who knows?

He is a much more remarkable-looking man now, than he was when first we met him: his pleasant, honest face is gaunt, and grief channelled, his blue eyes sad and hungry, from looking and weeping for the lost; his step no longer light and springy, his head no longer turned towards heaven, but bowed upon his breast. He had looked to heaven long enough, but found it brass; he had been taught to believe there was a God there, who looked after His creatures, but how had he been looked after? Smitten to the ground, till the chariot of His wrath had passed over him; "the

ploughers ploughed upon his back, and made long their furrows."

One day he was lying in his tent, stricken with fever, but carefully tended, for there was that in his face which drew the pity of his kind towards him. This was the tenth day, and life seemed as if it was slowly coming back to him once more. He had been dozing, and a dream came to him. He dreamed that he was dead, and carried through the air, past stars, and worlds, ever higher and higher, rising on the wings of angels. At last they stopped before the golden gates, and he heard the sounds of heavenly music. His bearers did not knock, but passed in, as a voice like a trumpet repeated, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

Godfrey thought of his mother as the words sounded in his ears, and presently she was at his side.

"Welcome, my dear son."

"Oh, mother," said Godfrey, "how beautiful you are; and what wondrous land is this?"

"This is the gate of heaven, and everyone here is beautiful, because we have all seen God."

"Shall I see Him, mother?"

"If you love Him," was the answer.

"Mother," said her son, "I had rather see Alice. Oh, where is she?"

"She is not here. Go, seek her, my son, for you are not yet fit for heaven."

And pressing a light kiss upon his brow, she left him. The angels came again with outstretched pinions, to bear him earthwards, but the flapping of their wings wakened him, and he found, instead of the

"Go to the House, and telegraph at once who is there."

Grab and Growler had played him a shabby trick; had they handed him the note at once, he could easily outwit his brother, and keep him in town for a day or two, hurry on the sale, put the money in his pocket, and bid his brother "good-bye." He could do it; what was the use of being clever if he could not do so much?

But the game was up now. Well, he had some need of his wits still. One thing was certain, he must keep the news of his brother's return a secret for a little, or all the harpies would settle about his path, and perhaps obstruct his freedom. Another thought flashed into his mind as he sat waiting for an answer to his telegram, a thought which made his blood run cold—ay, quite as cold as it did once before in his life—he wondered if his brother called at the bank when in town, and if so did he—

Supposing that tap on the shoulder came after all from someone else besides himself, what then? Psha! Godfrey was a "softy," and would not do it for twice ten thousand pounds. Well, thank heaven, he could safely say he never allowed a soft spot to come between him and a hard deed. His telegram was handed to him, he tore it open and read:

"The squire be come, and Master Alec be with him."

XXVII.

POOR Godfrey left London in a kind of stupor; he hardly dared to think, such ugly visions came to him

from the process; he travelled homewards very much in the same pre-occupied fashion, passing familiar places without a look. He did not see the porters whispering together at the station, touching their caps to him respectfully. He strode on to the old place, but in all his pre-occupation taking care to avoid the little bridge.

Mrs. Anderson was sitting at tea with her nephew when she heard the side-door opened, and a step go up the stairs. She started up.

"That's the squire's step if he's alive, but slow like for him," she said, following up the stairs, but presently came back noiselessly.

"It's him—he's in his mother's room. Tom, you run across to the Clewbend, and see Miss Mary, and tell her he's come, and to send Mr. Alec—he'll feel lonely like with no one to welcome him."

Godfrey had passed straight to his mother's room, the closed shutters showing the faint outline of the draped bed. How often had he come in to find it so, and sit quietly while the poor head ached; but she was no longer here, though he could not doubt that in spirit she still watched over him. Oh, how much he wanted her, and throwing himself by the bedside, he poured out his thoughts in tears. While he was away he had but one sorrow, now he had many, and one deeper than all, which brought the blood of shame to his face—and the same mother bore them both. If she knew it—but no, she could not, for did she not say she was happy?

He got up calmed, and better able to look at his position; and first of all, by his mother's bedside, he

forgave his brother the injury he knew he had done him, and descending the stairs again, he found Mrs. Anderson had done her best to make him comfortable in his mother's morning-room. A bright fire, hastily thrown in from her own, looked calm and steady—a well-regulated fire, with its feelings under control, it seemed as if it had been waiting for him, and soothed him without that fuss and splutter of welcome. The old housekeeper never received any of the family without its help.

"Bless you, it's always welcome, it is; if they're cut up about anything they have it to look at, and if they're happy, they have it to poke."

She was moved to tears by the look in her young master's eyes, as she stood curtsying her welcome, remembering what had been three years before.

"Oh, sir," she said, "but you're welcome; the old place never looked the same from the day you left it. Changes on all hands—old Job Leigh is parted with, and I got my own 'paper' only yesterday; but now you've come, sir, all will go right."

"I hope so," said Godfrey. "I wish to make no changes; those who served my father and mother are best fitted to serve me. When was Mr. Clarence here?"

"The last time was before the election, sir; a crooked body, clerk to some great lawyer, comes to see after things, and all the seeing is just to find someut he can turn to money."

Godfrey was beginning to see that a man has something to live for besides grief.

He was glad to see Alec—they had always been

friends, and as friends they grasped hands ; then suddenly, as he remembered the tie between his lost love and Alec, he covered his face with his hands and wept sore.

"You'll forgive me, Alec, I know you will ; you'll never see me break down again, but, oh, it is a different coming home to what I pictured when I went away."

Mrs. Anderson spread the table with refreshments—a welcome was only half given till the board was spread.

"He'll eat a bit now," she said to herself, "that he has a companion ; the like of him never eat anything by themselves." And the kind-hearted creature left them together.

She would have given much to have been able to ask him where he had left Miss Alice, but the moment she looked in his face she saw that which she dare not meddle with. Godfrey, on the other hand, sitting opposite his friend, felt like a man about to plunge into an unknown sea, coming forward to the brink, then starting back with a shiver ; he knew a sea, the waves of which had gone over his soul before this—no wonder then if he shrank from a second death. Alec, on his part, would have at once asked for news of his cousin if he had ever believed in the story, and he felt ashamed of his own selfishness in thinking so little of Alice, since his own life-story had begun so sweetly for him. And coming to the "Firs" that evening, he had remembered how he had suspected something that day he joined his sister at Leconfield, and meant to have it "out" with her, but the sudden news of

Clarence standing for the borough, put all else out of his head.

The young squire's return had opened up the past behind him, and now sitting opposite to each other, the suspicion came back to him once more, as drawing a tiny note from his pocket, he handed it across to his friend with the words, "From Mary."

He took it, but his trembling fingers refused to open it for a time—he feared it as if it was a dead body. He read thus:—

"Welcome home, a thousand times. You will wish to hear the story of the past: do not wait till you think yourself able to bear it, but go at once to Bolton Villa, Eastthorpe, the only place where the story can be told.

"Your faithful friend,

"MARY NORTON."

For a moment he shrank, but no longer; had he not come home to face it out?

"Will you walk with me as far as the train, Alec? I must be off."

"Come along."

They walked in silence, and as Alec stood on the platform waving his hand to his friend, he could not help thinking of all the weight of sorrow which could so crush the light out of that once happy face, and wishing that the sunshine would yet struggle through the cloud.

XXVIII.

THE train deposited Godfrey at the little cross station somewhere about midnight. He little thought that he was following in her very footsteps; he little thought that he had indeed begun to seek her. Our angel often leads us blindfold to the haven where we would be. It was just such another night three years ago. Inquiring of the sleepy porter the way he should take, he struck across country at a swinging pace, lighted by a calm moonlight. He felt an interest in the place he was seeking, and he wondered whom he should hear the story from, preparing himself, as he had agreed, for probing his wound, nay, thrusting his very hands into the gaping sore. He found himself in the little hamlet long before daylight, and when the sun rose he admired the look of neatness and comfort of this little spot, hid away from the strife of the world's conflict. He occupied himself in finding out Bolton Villa by guesswork. There were one or two better class houses in the little street: young Mr. Simmonds had built a pretty one for his bride, and his father's house, standing at the beginning of the little village, was an old-fashioned, neatly thatched, dormer-windowed farmhouse; but our traveller passed each one of these, and paused at last before the pretty gothic porch. Not much credit in guessing, where there is only one, he thought. A very pretty view rewarded him for his walk; a sea-view, with a glimpse of the wall-like chalk cliff to the west, standing out in strong relief. He looked at the cottage with interest; the neatly-kept grass, the well-chosen flowers, the pretty garden seats, all attracted

his notice. He would have stepped over the low railing, and stretched himself on one of the seats, but feared to look intrusive, so he stretched himself in the corner outside, under a grand old beech, and thought over the life which lay before him, and which he must live. Then, as day grew stronger, and began to stir in the village, he rose and walked up and down, becoming as eager and excited to see the shutters opened as if he knew what they concealed. But by-and-by a strange sight presented itself to his eyes; women with babies in their arms, and girls with babies, and men carrying babies, all wending toward the same spot, all disappearing within the porch, to come out again without the babies.

"An infant school," said Godfrey; "but who ever heard of such an hour?" He had gone down to the sea beach and refreshed himself with a bath, and while dressing in his sheltered nook, he still watched the babies come, and puzzled over the problem of what he could find in such a place.

He walked briskly up the bank, crossed the open common, pushed through the swinging gate, and pulled the bell, tapping his boot against the pavement as he stood, like an impatient horse which paws the ground it rests on. The door flew open, and Godfrey Bennimore stood face to face with "Tib."

He had never seen her since those days of sickness and death at the "Firs," and his emotion at sight of her could not be hidden. Tib neither screamed nor fainted; she grasped his hand, and, stepping out, closed the door noiselessly behind, then raising a warning finger, she said,

"Come round here, Mr. Godfrey; I must prepare

her, but I do believe joy never yet killed anyone."

And preceding him, silent and bewildered, his temples throbbing, his heart beating, but afraid to speak, lest he should break the spell, she led him to a glass door opening from the garden into a sweet picture of a lady's breakfast-room. He stood where she left him, afraid to breathe, pressing his hand against his side to keep down his heart, as it seemed to him, but he could not still its wild beating. Tib found her lady finishing her toilet by knotting a piece of ribbon round her throat. She turned round and read the face she looked at, all lightness, not a corner to hide a sorrow in.

"God is good, Miss Alice; He has brought him."

No need for more: in a moment a long cry, which bridged over the three years of pain and sorrow, met Tib's ear, and then all was still. She went about her usual business, and prepared breakfast with a heart which she had not carried for years, so light, and happy, and thankful was it: and all the while she broke out into little prayers to God, returning Him thanks, praising Him for His goodness; for one of her beliefs was that no gift of God was ours until we returned to Him our peppercorn of thankful acknowledgment: and was not Godfrey His gift? had he not been prayed for, and waited for, and worked for? And here he was, in God's good time.

After a "reasonable" time she thought she might enter with breakfast; for she was a sensible woman, and knew that happiness, as a rule, does not prevent hunger. But it was almost untasted; those happy children could not spare the time from looking into

each other's eyes, reading there the history of suffering in each. Years of pain are but as a moment, compared to the "weight of joy" in united hearts.

"Oh, Tib," said Alice, "come and look at him; has he not grown into a great bearded giant? I feel that I ought to be afraid of him, but I'm not."

The face Tib looked at was a calm, thoughtful, noble face; the sorrow in it was deeply sown, and made it grand; but now every feature quivered in the new life of hope and fulfilment; and Tib's faithfulness was not forgotten, the deep eyes looked their thanks, and the grand face bent over hers, and lifting her in his strong arms, he pressed a kiss on the little swarthy cheek.

"Thank you, Tib, for taking such good care of my wife."

Tib was thankful when she felt her own faithful pair of feet under her once more. She was not accustomed to be elevated in this manner, and she felt rather afraid of his great strength "cracking her like an egg shell."

At the "Firs," Mrs. Anderson set the house in order; open windows and doors admitted light and sunshine, giving to the whole place that look of some one being at home. Early in the morning she heard the tread of a heavy foot on the gravel outside, and going to the door she found a thick-set man, with beaky nose, sniffing about the place. He inquired in a sly way if the governor was to be seen.

"Who do you want?" she asked; "is it Mr. Clarence?"

"Who else would I come here askin' for? Come, me old gal, look alive, tell him."

"Bless you, Mr. Clarence is not here, nor wasn't for long enough; and I can safely say, won't for long enough, neither."

"You're sure you're tellin' me the truth?"

"Quite sure," she answered. "I have no reason for telling anything else, whatever other folk may have."

"Then, Dick," he said, addressing his double, who stood with a sly look behind him, moving his finger and thumb slowly up and down the bridge of his nose, "then, Dick, I'm blest if we're not sold, and he's slipped his links. Is it true, ma'am, that the squire be come?"

"Yes, quite true; and not before he's wanted, if all I hear be true."

This pair moved off, talking slyly, and very soon another pair presented themselves on the same quest. But Clarence was still clever enough to set a trap, and they had fallen into it. They heard nothing of Godfrey's return, and thought it natural to meet their debtor at his own house. The sale was arranged for that day, and they knew a good portion of the proceeds must go into their own pockets. But on coming to Hacklebury they found strange news before them. The squire had come, there was no sale, and no Clarence. They were sold! Gathering up as much money as lay at hand, Clarence, after receiving the telegram from home, slipped out, taking the night mail for Liverpool, and some hours before Mrs. Anderson's inquiring visitors arrived, the member for Leconfield had steamed out of reach, perhaps to save himself from being sent to a less congenial place than he is now seeking. He left his native shores with a curse; not one regret did he cast behind him. No, he felt clever

enough still, and strong enough to lift himself on to a new rung in the ladder of life, in the land he was going to. It was no Jacob's ladder that he aspired to; though gilt, it was with the baser metal. And on the whole he could shuffle and cheat and lie there better, for all anyone knew, than in this old, worn-out ground, curse it, and with the devil's help he need never say die. A generous brother thought of him, a generous sun shone on him, but he turned from all with a curse, and went his own way, and we shall see his face no more.

Mr. and Mrs. Bolton heard the good news of Godfrey's return, and drove over to the villa with their little girl, who made friends on the spot with the bronzed and bearded stranger.

"Ah, Mr. Bennimore, you are the happy prince, for whom our sweet princess has been waiting!" said Mrs. Bolton, who was "charmed" at the turn events had taken. "Oh, it is all so romantic," she went on, "and so nice, to happen in our village; it will make it famous, and by-and-by, when it all becomes known, I am sure we must build a hotel to accommodate the visitors."

XXIX.

ALICE was very happy, who could doubt it? yet in the midst of her new-found joy she thought of her babies; what would become of them? Yes, to be sure, Tib would live on in the cottage, and keep up the school and the babies. She could not bear the thought of having her happiness secured at these poor people's expense.

The moment the old squire heard of Godfrey's

return, and the raising of the dead, he got his carriage brought round, and set off with Mary to welcome his pet; and as he drew up at the little gate, there stood Godfrey and Alice to welcome him, but the sight of those dear familiar faces brought back painful thoughts to Alice, and she wept her welcome on the old man's breast. The news flew like the wind; no ill news could outstrip it in speed, and far and near the skeleton of the old story was raised, and nothing else was talked of but the why and the wherefore of it all. One conclusion was arrived at in Hacklebury, that they must welcome the squire and his bride in a right royal manner. And all Alice's works and labour of love were exaggerated into a story of the most fabulous dimensions.

Godfrey had much business awaiting him, of which he told the old squire. "But, sir, I cannot bear to let Alice out of my sight until she is my own; we have both suffered much." The old and the young squire grasped hands.

And now rather a curious incident took place. A large body of men, workmen in clean holiday dress, walked up the path, and presented an address, praying that she who had come amongst them, and had shown herself an angel of mercy to all, would allow their village to have the honour of her wedding, and they to have the pleasure of witnessing her happiness.

The address was beautifully written, and was the work of young Mr. Simmonds. The old squire wished that Alice should be married from his own house; the young squire sympathised in the villagers' desire, as it would materially hasten his own happiness, and Alice inclined to grant the poor people's wish.

The old squire waived his own claim in favour of those honest, loving people, who crowded round to tell the story of her love.

They began their preparations in good earnest, as a labour of love, and before nightfall arches spanned the road from the church to the villa, making it look like a floral arcade; coloured flags drooped from high poles at intervals along the line, the poles festooned with the gayest flowers. Words of welcome to the young squire, and blessings on his fair bride, met the eye at every turn. The wonder was that so much in the way of decoration could be done in the time, and done so artistically; but they knew she loved beauty and order, and affection is a cunning craftsman. All the children of the village, prettily dressed, and each carrying flowers, were to form a procession, and strew her path with them.

Alice was deeply touched at all these tokens of the love which she had not worked for. Oh, who could call the poor ungrateful?

Godfrey thought of his brother—he was so happy he could forgive much—he even found excuses for him. Clarence was so clever and ambitious, and his path was marked by temptation; it would perfect his joy if his brother shared it, and Alice wished him to come; she would no longer fear him, and never from her lips should Godfrey hear what cause she had to fear him, that brother who he believed loved him well, after his fashion—ay, surely, it was after his fashion.

He telegraphed to his club, also to Mr. Hare, as that gentleman was wanted to meet Mr. Monteith, Alice's

man of business. He received an immediate answer to his telegram from his lawyer :—

"I shall come—your brother absconded—thought to have gone to America."

This was a cruel pang, but he could bear anything, with her by his side to brighten his darkest hour. Few welcomes were warmer or more cordial than Mr. Monteith's; he seemed to be made up of new parchment for the occasion, crackling and chuckling over his fair client.

"Ha, ha," he said, "come to light like a lost will. You had a fast friend in Miss Mary—the way she would come to me and say, 'More money, my friend, to go with the rest,' was irresistible; but I had a shrewd guess all the time that when the right moment came I should find you all together."

His face was radiant with a happy satisfaction that owing to him the machinery set in motion was oiled and kept in working order.

White tents, with gay pennons flying, dotted the spacious lawns of Boltons Court, and every villager, and not a few strangers, received a hearty welcome; good things were provided in abundance, and Godfrey heard nothing but blessings on his beautiful bride as they passed slowly through the crowds.

The merriment was at its height when the travelling carriage drew up, that was to take away from their midst the fragile woman, who, doing her duty faithfully, had kept her own heart green, while helping to raise and elevate her kind. Many a deep and earnest "God bless you" met her ear, as not without emotion she took her seat. Poor Mills, the first on whom she

had effected wonders, stood, hat in hand, struggling to separate his thoughts into words, as they rose in a lump from his very heart.

"You'll not forget us, ma'am, we know that ; and you'll see, ma'am, when you come to see us, that we are keeping up—nothing you ever did will perish—me and mine may well cry, God bless you !——"

And the poor fellow had to stop, though not half through the task he had set himself, and his last words were taken up by hundreds. Few brides ever had such a leave-taking, and proud and happy as a king—Love had crowned him at last—Godfrey took his seat beside her, promising to bring back his wife to them very soon.

Tib stood at the head of her regiment of babies saying nothing, but looking the love she felt from out of those wondrous depths of eyes. And as the carriage rolled away such a cheer arose,—a shout of blessings borne after them on the clear air, borne above them, it may be, to the footstool of the great Giver of all our gifts.

"How I wish Alec and Nellie had been with us," said the old squire with streaming eyes.

"How I wish Tom had been here," said Mrs. Bolton, glancing at Mary, and somehow the wish brought the hand of each together in a sisterly pressure.

XXX.

GODFREY and Alice spent some weeks in London to learn what they could of Clarence. Godfrey applied to Mr. Finch as an old friend of his brother's, and he

furnished enough of materials for him to seek no further.

"Mr. Clarence was very clever, sir, but bless you, he wouldn't be held—threw me off, sir, when I ventured to give a little advice, and when a man refuses that, sir, I look on him as shaky. He *was* clever, no doubt of it, perhaps just a leetle *too* clever, sir."

"Do you think," said Godfrey, "there is anyone in London who knows his whereabouts, any friend of his—any female? I believe my brother was not married."

"I can say this," said Mr. Finch, clapping his little wings together, "not a man in London knows more than guessing; and as for female friends, sir, Mr. Clarence was always tacking about to avoid them. I know there was a poor girl that disappeared in a sudden kind of way, and he was charged with having a hand in it."

Mr. Finch did not of course see the necessity of explaining that he had himself charged Clarence a very high figure indeed for the suspicion.

"Could you direct me in my search for news of that poor creature?" said Godfrey.

Mr. Finch at once gave him the number of the house off the Strand, and there Godfrey betook himself. After a little leading up, he got the old lady on the track. At first all was blank—her memory gone, no head for anything but letting the rooms; on finding, however, that the inquirer was the brother of her old lodger, and not anyone "spying about," she remembered everything.

"She was an honest creature, sir, but deceived; the gentleman was young and gay. Well, now, Lord knows, you're no more like him than gas is like the sun; not that I hev anything to say against him. He treated me vara handsome, he ded."

"Can you tell me where I can find that woman?"

"Me tell ye? naw, naw, lekly enough she tuk to the reever. She wouldn't tek to the streets."

And she gave him a little history of the midnight flight, and what had led to it.

"When she gave me that paper, sir, so proud like, I knew she were deceived, and when she bed me read it, I couldn't find in me heart to tell her, for I feel for them ignorant creatures, but her 'lines,' sir, were no more nor some prented notis; but stay a bit, I think ——" and she bustled about a little drawer in a side-table, first pulling out her spectacles and putting them across her nose. She soon drew out from a litter of papers a square printed sheet.

"I put et away that morning she left, sir. 'Who knows,' ses I, 'but et might be called for yet,' and you see I was right; there's often a dale of valye in a 'bit o' paper.'"

Godfrey groaned in spirit to think a brother of his, or anyone made in the human form, should so far forget their manhood and their strength as to use it so. He took the paper with him, strengthening the old lady in her opinion of its value by what he left with her in its stead. She acknowledged herself always able to do a good "stroke" of business, and seeing this scrap of paper brought so much, she had still something which might yield her more in the

way of value, or "turning a penny," a phrase which she was partial to. She went out of the room, coming back in a few minutes.

"Mebbe ye might valye this potygraph—he hed a many tuk, whill his fancy lasted. She left everything behind her but the 'duds' she come in. Ye may hev thet ef ye lek."

The bargain was soon struck between them.

There were tears in his eyes as Godfrey told Alice the information he had gleaned, and putting the photograph into her hand, he said,—

"How could he deceive a woman like that—what a trusting face it is."

He little knew that Alice could finish the sad story for him, that the poor, silent, burdened soul who sought her shelter was indeed Ruth, and she let her tears fall fast on the poor patient face.

"She was his wife, dear, in the sight of God and in her own pure heart, was she not?" asked Alice of her husband.

"I believe so, though the law would differ from us; and I look on that little one so strangely brought to your notice, as my brother Clarence's child, entitled to take her place as such. Poor Clarence, he has taken my exile up as I laid it down. Ah, well, if he could only lose himself to find himself he would yet be happy; but after all he was too clever."

Up to this time Godfrey had been making excuses for his brother, schooling himself to think less hardly of him; but rags like these now failed to cover him, and in all its nakedness his life lay before him—not pleasant to look at or to think of.

XXXI.

GODFREY and Alice were very happy, so happy that they often asked themselves if they deserved so much. Just as in the old days of their sorrow they had asked God why He wrung out for them the bitter dregs of His cup, and made them suffer more than anyone else ? And now He made them to rejoice, remembering no more the tears, and they had learned life lessons, too—how little they had thought of others till God made them ! He taught them not to live singly while they had the whole world to be joined to in sympathy and kinship.

A purse which will not open except for self—a sympathy which goes in instead of out, and a charity which covers all our own sins without one corner over—this is common enough amongst us. These are our children, born to us of ourselves, and become to many of us as pleasant and natural as children.

“The heaviest-laden man the whole world over is the man who carries himself ;” so said Tib, and was she not always right ?

Those two who in their blindness thought they had nothing to live for but each other, have learned all these lessons by years of sorrow ; and now that the heaven is blue above them once more, they see they are little better than children freed from school and about to begin life—their hearts’ desire is to leave this world a little better than they found it. We cannot all be astronomers ; we cannot all be giants in intellect, but the most unlettered can help to bear his brother’s

burden, and the weakest can be kindly affectioned one to another.

Godfrey and Alice turned their faces homewards, and as the signs of welcome met them, the young squire looked at his beautiful wife.

"This is all for you," he said; "I have never done anything to win their love."

"Nor have you," said Alice with a proud and happy smile, "done anything to forfeit it—it is only for me in so far as I belong to you."

His hand sought hers, as he said with a shiver, "Oh, what an escape we had of never belonging to each other at all! I can scarcely think it is all real yet; are you sure you are not an angel, and that you will not some day raise your wings and leave me?"

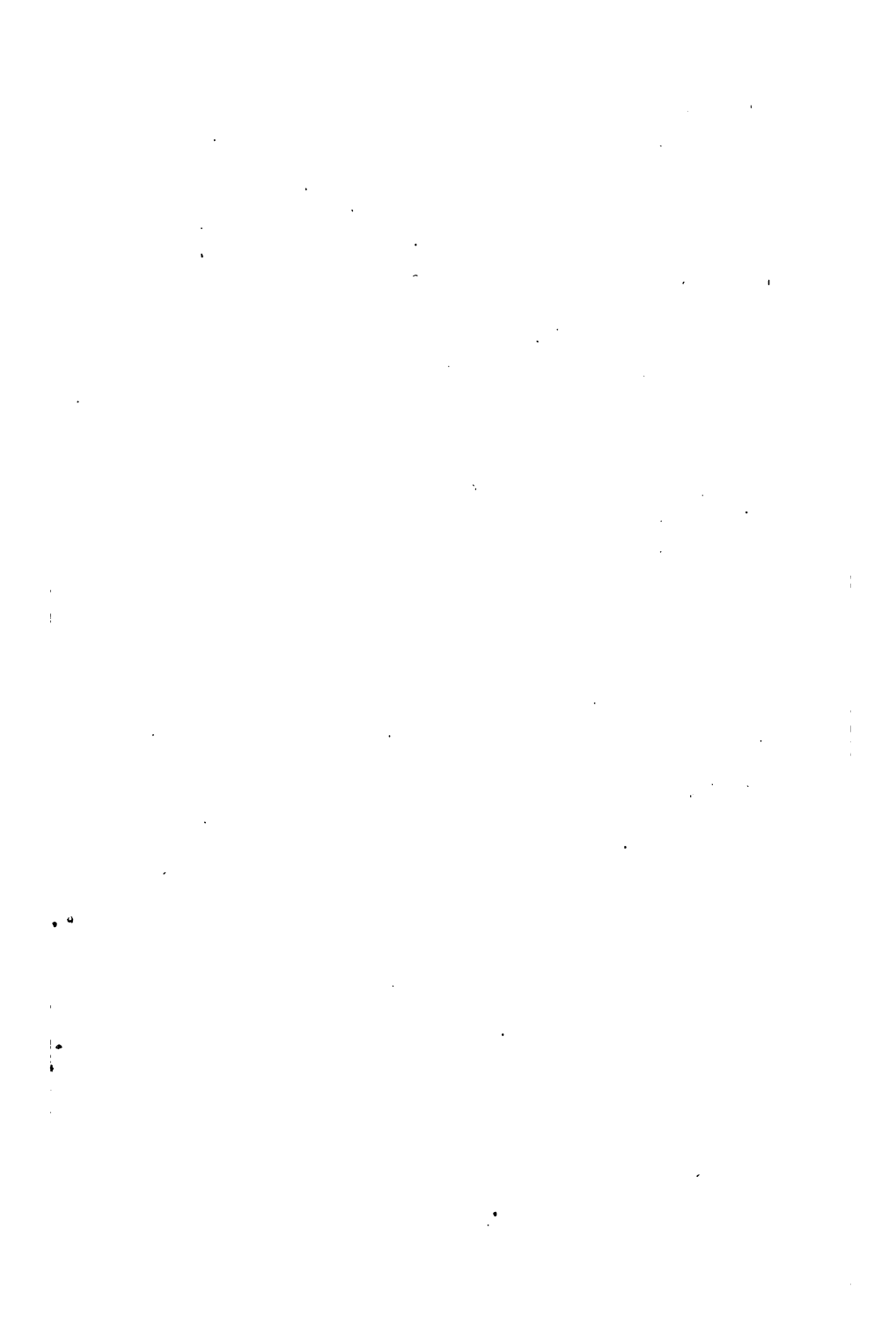
Alice laughed merrily.

"You need not fear, I shall soon satisfy you that I am no angel; but oh, Godfrey, we must not complain, we have learned something in our night of sorrow."

Her husband looked thoughtful; yes, he had learned much, but had he not lost something, too?

He took her in his arms, and amid the cheers of the multitude he carried her across the threshold of her new home.

THE END.



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